Ethical Consumerism:
everyday negotiations in the construction of an ethical self

- by -

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Abstract

Despite market research findings which assert that up to 90% of all consumers believe that ethical issues are an important consideration when purchasing products, estimates of the number of people consuming ethically with any regularity remain at around 1%. The aim of this thesis is to look at the lives and purchases of committed ethical consumers to show the complexities inherent in ethical consumerism which determine this elusive nature of ethical consumption. A series of interviews were held with ethical consumers: the first interview concentrated on the consumer's beliefs, values and biographies; the second interview took place in the consumer's home and examined contents of their food cupboards and bathrooms, as well as their cleaning products. This allowed analysis of the stories that the consumers tell about their reasons for becoming an ethical consumer, an examination of the individual's construction of an appropriate ethical position, and a questioning of the consumer's capacity and willingness to follow through their ethics in practice.

At a theoretical level the thesis is situated within contemporary theories of consumption, but includes insights from social psychology and moral philosophy to allow the study of consumption to be informed by theories of ethics and action. Notions of identity and lifestyle construction have been applied and extended to enable an understanding of the consumer as an ethical self, with complex relationships to fluidity and consistency. Findings about the differences between ethics and action have highlighted the roles of pleasure, health, money, convenience, love and graciousness in consumption, whereas changes in behaviour in different mileux reveal the effect of structural and social barriers to ethical consumerism. The thesis concludes with a suggestion of the most appropriate form for geographical knowledge to take in any attempt to reunite production and consumption through a geography of commodities.

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When I began my PhD, my only educational achievement was a science degree in Environmental Studies. That I have written a thesis that attempts to incorporate areas of cultural geography, sociology and moral philosophy demonstrates the enormous debt of gratitude that I owe to my academic community. I begin by thanking Phil Crang for taking a chance on such an unlikely student. Without his guidance, insightfulness and ability to disseminate complex ideas, I could not have begun the process of making sense of the theory. Jacquie Burgess has been wonderful throughout, offering me academic advice, unstinting support and more of her time than I had a right to expect. I owe a huge thanks to David Smith for his help. Without his comments I would have been unable to find my way through the maze of moral philosophy.

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Chapter One - Introducing the Ethical Consumer

Introduction

The ethical consumer is an elusive figure, consistently evading market researchers' attempts at quantification and classification. There are a plethora of notions about the nature of the ethical consumer - be it the hero of consumption; the well-educated, middle-class elitist; or the over-emotional hippy. The aim of this thesis is to move beyond the stereotypes by examining the stories of ethical consumers to understand who the ethical consumers are, and why they consume ethically. Rather than an in-depth look at any one area of interest in the ethical consumer, this thesis has a broad focus examining: the original reasons for becoming an ethical consumer; the structure of the ethics involved; and the practices that ethical consumerism entails.

Specifically the aims of this thesis are:

- To understand the construction and/or appropriation of consumer ethics;
- To examine the interaction of ethics and identity in consumption practices;
- To utilise consumption theories to provide a more nuanced picture of the ethical consumer:
- To recognise how the ethical consumer negotiates the everyday barriers to ethical consumption.

I shall use this chapter to introduce a variety of aspects of ethical consumerism. I shall begin by introducing myself as an ethical consumer, examining my own subjectivity and reasons for studying ethical consumers. The next section intercuts the biography of one of the interviewees, Jo, with market research findings about ethical consumers. The aim is to contrast the categorisations of the market researchers with the individuality of Jo's story, to begin to deconstruct the ethical consumer stereotypes. I include definitions of my terminology relating to ethical consumerism, a brief history of consumer action, and review of the research into the barriers to ethical consumption. I then move on to introduce existing literatures on consumption, identity and ethics. This chapter therefore, reviews and challenges existing knowledges about ethical consumers. Finally, I shall introduce the thesis structure with a short description of the remaining chapters.

Positionality: introducing myself as an ethical consumer

I have never been quite sure about writing through my positionality, and have often seen the practice as being more navel-gazing than reflexive. This said though, I would have learnt nothing from my time interviewing ethical consumers if I did not recognise that they, at least, thought my positionality of primary importance. As I have started to plan out my first chapter, I have come to realise that so much of my inspiration and knowledge are attributable to my own life, not just as an ethical consumer myself, but as someone who has been for several years immersed within a commitment to consumer change. I feel sure that the reader, as much as the interviewee, is likely to feel the necessity to know about my background in order to place my (undoubtedly subjective) reading of ethical consumerism. It is, therefore, with reluctance - and yet the best of intentions - that I make my personal involvement with consumer ethics transparent.

My undergraduate degree is in Environmental Studies. I was not a highly motivated ethical consumer before I started my degree, but I avoided all factory farmed animal produce and had some environmentally friendly consumer practices that had rubbed off on me from several years of sharing flats with ethical consumers. With my degree course came knowledge, and with knowledge came a strengthening of my green consumer habits. The impossibility of trying to follow a "compassionately farmed" carnivorous diet finally became too daunting, and so I became an out and out vegetarian for purely practical, rather than ideological, purposes. And yet none of this represented a mind set.

The big sea-change came in the final year of my degree. Environmental Studies degrees are psychological, as well as educational, experiences. The student arrives with much idealism and energy, expecting to be provided with the foundations to enable them to change the world. By the second year of the degree it becomes clear that the international environmental problems begging for solutions are almost impossible to address, at least by the individual in the short-term, and a sense of fatalism sets in. By the final year the student has either become reconciled to the apocalypse, or has found for themselves a distinct area of environmentalism to pin their hopes on: for some this could be recycling, for others it might be simply cycling. At the beginning of my third year I was Finance

Officer for the University's sister charity Community Environmental Educational Developments. My need to raise money led to me carrying out a feasibility study on opening a shop with an environmentally friendly product range, which I wrote up as my dissertation. Green consumerism became my educational, and ideological, flag ship.

Despite my new found commitment to consumer power, I was aware that green consumerism was no easy answer. My feasibility study came to the reluctant conclusion that an eco-type shop would be an economic disaster, but worse than that, in conducting the research, a green consumer questionnaire had revealed a surprising fact – a large minority of the people taking Environmental Studies did not buy any environmentally friendly products. Optimistically convinced that this said as much about the potential of green consumerism as it did about the complexity, I set out, with newly acquired degree in hand, to seek my consumer fortune. I passed the time between degree and "real job" by working voluntarily for Oxfam, and added a commitment to fair trade to my collection of consumer ethics.

A thinly disguised begging letter to *New Consumer*, an organisation providing corporate information to ethical consumers, quickly paid off and I was taken on as a research assistant. Richard Adams, the managing director of *New Consumer*, was at the time heavily involved with initiating a scheme to open the first chain of ethical supermarkets in Britain, namely *Out of This World*. Because of this I was lucky enough to be able to divide my time between answering letters to *New Consumer* querying points about issues, companies or products, writing articles for the *New Consumer* magazine, and doing the groundwork on the criteria to be used by *Out of This World* to assess a product's ethical rating.

Because of my history of involvement with certain forms of consumer "movements", I have come to my thesis with obvious baggage. There is much that is good about this: I started my research with a clear idea of the gaps in knowledge related to ethical consumers and the practice of ethical consumerism, and exactly which of those gaps I wanted to fill; I knew a huge amount about manufacturers, products and environmental issues; I knew how to locate ethical consumers; and most of all I knew what ethical consumers were talking about. However, I accept that there is also a down side to my positionality: ethical consumers related to me as an ethical

consumer, and this undoubtedly affected what they told me (although the same would have to be said whatever my position); how ever much I try to be objective about issues I am unlikely to be pragmatic; I may maintain objectivity in analysing interviews, but the questions I asked in the first place were the questions that I knew to ask from my own experiences; and most of all, and this has been constantly borne in on me since I have been doing my Ph.D., my work is unlikely to be seen as being unrelated to political ends – although I have consistently argued that I can only further the interests of the "ethical consumer movement" if I retain a high degree of objectivity in listening to the motivations and practices of ethical consumers.

Thus, I have come to my Ph.D. with four years of "observation-participation" in the field of ethical consumerism beneath my (non-leather) belt. I did not read theory before I had seen practice; I knew the complexity of the ethical consumer's world of consumption before I was aware of the simplicity, or indeed the paucity, of the material written about the ethical consumer; and I did not learn of any relevant consumer issues from my interviewees or from academic books that were not already known to me. It is this entry to my research that has prompted me to begin this thesis by writing an introduction to ethical consumerism through an interviewee's biography. I hope in this way to place the reader in the same position to the following theoretical and empirical discussions as I was in myself. The chapter intentionally combines a mixture of academic works, consumer guides, market research and newspaper articles to show the full extent of the knowledge about the ethical consumer.

Contextuality: introducing Jo as an ethical consumer

I want to introduce the ethical consumer and the ethical consumer's world through the story of Jo, one of my interviewees. I wish the simple biographical details about Jo to act as a solid representation of an ethical consumer, linking and contrasting to the work produced on ethical consumerism. I have worked through some of the issues that Jo takes into account when shopping, and hope that these will come across as they are meant – as an aid to the reader who will encounter the issues constantly in the empirical chapters, rather than a determined effort to convert all and sundry to the ethical consumer cause.

Defining the ethical consumer

Jo is an ethical consumer. She answered the questionnaire I placed in the Ethical Consumer that asked "Are you an ethical consumer?". Despite the popular acceptance of the expression "ethical consumer", it is not unproblematic in the message it inadvertently conveys. To describe one set of consumer practices as being ethical is, unfortunately, to suggest that all other practices are unethical. There are other phrases in use which relate to the same phenomenon, but each carries with it its own difficulties: the sustainable consumer, using the terminology of 'Agenda 21' (and before that Ekins, 1989), holds elements of the unobtainable; the conscientious consumer, the egalitarian consumer or the planet friendly consumer all have the same problem as the ethical consumer; the new consumer, as a companion to new economics, although not conveying too negative an image of all other consumers, is less obviously specific and has been taken as representing a whole series of contemporary consumer practices when expressed as the new consumer society – see for example the collection of essays in Sulkumen et al (1997). So taking into account all the difficulties with alternative terms, I have decided to stay with the phrase "ethical consumer" as it remains the expression in most common usage, with consumer magazines, academics, business and, most importantly, the consumer all recognising it. From this it follows that "ethical consumption" is the process of choosing and utilising products through some ethical standards, and "ethical consumerism" is the promotion of ethics, in relation to the system of production, by the consumer. To simplify the terminology throughout the thesis, I shall refer to consumer concerns as "consumer ethics" or "ethical values". After some thought, I have decided to use "conventional consumer" to describe the "differently" ethical consumers, as it seems the most in-keeping with the subject matter (where conventional farming denotes non-organic farming methods).

Defining consumer ethics

On her questionnaire Jo classified herself as regularly buying environmentally friendly products, sometimes buying fair trade products, and being mostly vegetarian. And this once more returns us to the complexity of the definition of the ethical consumer. The Ethical Consumer Research Association, which produces books and magazines offering a guide to the consumer as to which products to choose or avoid through the ethics of production, describes itself as "...promoting:

universal human rights; environmental sustainability; animal welfare" (ECRA, 1997). Each product is rated for thirteen independent criteria, including political donations and boycott calls, thereby allowing the consumer to make judgements based on their personal concerns. Certain marketing surveys, however, have assumed ethical consumerism to be a separate process to "green" consumerism or the promotion of animal rights (see, for example, Mintel, 1991 and 1994). Here ethical issues are those such as oppressive regimes, irresponsible marketing, Third World exploitation, armaments and social policies of the company. To make things more complicated '*The Green Consumer Guide*' (Elkington and Hailes, 1988: 5) included cruelty to animals and adversely affecting Third World countries as issues which the green consumer would act upon. In choosing my definition of "ethical consumerism" I did not wish to be too overly prescriptive about what constitutes ethical as opposed to green or animal friendly, and yet at the same time did not wish to see all forms of production deliberations taken into account[1]. I have, therefore, taken my definition of ethical consumer practices to relate to any combination of animal welfare, environmental or developmental/human rights considerations.

A brief history of ethical consumerism

Jo has seen many changes in consumer values over the years. Growing up as a British Colonial in India, Jo had been used to servants, and when she arrived in England after India's independence she had to learn to shop for herself. This was in the days before supermarkets were the backbone of the consumer experience, when people shopped in markets for reasons of economy, or in corner shops. Jo tells how during and after the war it was common to make do with what you had: the stigma attached to repaired and second hand products came later. In terms of ethical awareness Jo has witnessed a huge change in attitudes. She says that her generation grew up taking the world for granted, nobody realised that there were dangers attached to people's actions – her first realisation came from reading Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring' (1962), a book that she says stunned and frightened her. Similarly, even though she had always known about the separation of worlds between the colonialists and the Indians, she says that she only really became aware of Third World exploitation when it became common to talk about

[1] By this I mean to avoid including groups such as the American Family Association, currently boycotting companies for promoting depravity or homosexuality, under the banner of ethical consumerism (Jeffreys, 1995: 6-7).

such things in the 70s and 80s. Even after she learnt about problems related to First World consumption practices she says that there was a lag of about ten years between knowledge and her personal action.

The consumer has never been devoid of an ethical position. Writing in the 18th century, Adam Smith, the acknowledged father of economics, posited that individuals purchasing in their own interest would guide the market by means of an "invisible hand" to the optimum outcome over all. Indeed, Smith (1776) went further and suggested that taking other criteria into consideration would bring about no good at all. Thus, from the beginning of economics the consumer has been prescribed the role of "ethical egoist" (Van der Steen, 1995: 31) to bring about utilitarian ends. Whilst Smith saw a separation of the consumer and the labour involved in production in terms of ethics, he quite clearly perceived a link between the consumer and labour in terms of the cost of a product. He observed that the word "value" had two meanings in relation to commodities "... and sometimes expresses the utility of some particular product, and sometimes the power of purchasing other goods which the possession of that object conveys" (Smith, 1970: 131) These two values he called use-value and exchange-value respectively. The exchange-value essentially was a measure of labour, allowing the producer to exchange a commodity for one of roughly the same value of labour. In 'Capital', Marx reworked Smith's theory of value. As the social relations of production and exchange became naturalised into the exchange-value of a commodity, so the commodity appears to have intrinsic value. This "fetishisation" of commodities veils the social processes of production behind an apparent relationship between things (Marx, 1976: 165). Because of this veiling:

> "...products appear and disappear before the consumers' eyes as if by spontaneous generation, and it is an astute shopper indeed who has any idea at all about what most things are composed of and what kinds of people made them." (Jhally, 1990: 49)

The position of ethical egoist has meant that the consumer has limited understanding of the social, and environmental, realities of production perpetuated by consumption practices. This deficiency is accentuated by the number of intermedaries in the chain between action and outcome, making it difficult to understand the impact of our lifestyles (Lachs, 1981: 12).

When *'Silent Spring'* acted as a wake-up call for the environment in 1962, it started to become clear that Smith had failed to foresee that so many of the effects of production should fall outside of the economics of consumption, with pollution and species depletion becoming external to the price of a good, and therefore being paid for by society in general (Norton, 1995: 7). At around the same time international concern started to grow over the impacts of First World consumption on the Third World: locked into a global trading system and suffering deteriorating terms of trade, it seemed that the Third World was not included in the optimum outcome overall. In Geneva, 1964, the first United Nations Conference for Trade and Development heard the call for Trade Not Aid, and the concepts of fair trade and Alternative Trading Organisations were born (EFTA, 1995: 10). Throughout the 60s and 70s fair trade was indeed an alternative practice, representing a movement away from capitalism (EFTA, 1995: 29), aimed more at awareness raising than Third World income (EFTA, 1995: 11) and because of that a highly niched market. Towards the end of the 70s Traidcraft, a company dedicated to fair trade, was initiated, and Oxfam, which had been already been working to relieve poverty since the 40s, added fair trade with the Third World to its agenda (Revell, 1998). With the tide change of political and economic thought in the 1980s, especially the failure of communism, fair trade made an intentional effort to move away from being an alternative trade form and began the process of reforming mainstream trading relations (EFTA, 1995: 29).

1971 saw the publication of the *'Consumers' Guide to the Protection of the Environment'* written by Holliman (a geography graduate from UCL!) for Friends of the Earth, who were established in the same year (Frisch, 1994: 84). The book opened with the line: "Every consumer decision we make has an impact on the environment." and espoused the use of consumer power to "vote" against environmentally damaging consumer behaviour, thereby also espousing a new ethical role for the consumer. The concerns of the book represented much of the academic thinking at the time: Malthusian theories of resource depletion; Packard's (1967) ideas about producers' deliberate creation of waste through built in obscelence; and of course Carson's worries about pesticides. By the 1980s DDTs had been banned in the Developed World and environmental arguments had begun to incorporate more than simple need-want debates in consumer actions. The green consumer could now consume carefully rather than consume less

(Gabriel and Lang, 1995: 164). As high profile issues such as CFCs, rainforest destruction and global warming hit the headlines, green consumer behaviour became a mixture of avoid, recycle, re-use and buy the merchandise in support of your favourite environmental charity. Towards the end of the 1980s green marketing became a common practice, and there was a proliferation of green claims, some true, some false, which began to create confusion for the consumer (Young, 1989). The time was right for a new green consumer's guide, and Elkington and Hailes hit the top of the best sellers list with their 1988 release.

The roots of the modern animal welfare movement were laid down in the 1970s. Peter Singer (1975), moral philosopher, published a book called *'Animal Liberation'* in which he contended that speciesism could be compared to racism and sexism. The book acted as a catalyst for the action on animal rights (Anon1, 1995: 19). Throughout the 1980s animal welfare spread from the marginal domain of the Animal Liberation Front ɔ be taken seriously across several areas of consumer concern, but primarily, and most successfully, in the anti-fur campaign. The animal rights boycotts of the 1980s led directly to three of the world's four largest cosmetic companies abandoning all animal testing of cosmetics (Bennett, T: 1995), and the creation of the Cosmetic Industry's Coalition for Animal Welfare (CICAW) (Watts, 1994). Animal experimentation had for long been contentious, and the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection was founded in 1898, but the latter openly admits that it has achieved more in the last few years than it had within the previous 90 years of its existence (Bennett, W: 1995).

Vegetarianism is more difficult to trace to its roots, being related to many different religious groups and political campaigns, including women's suffrage and pacifism (Keenes and Willetts, 1995: 38) and spanning several millenia[2]. Vegetarianism outside of religious ideologies is generally viewed as a dissenting practice, rejecting traditional culinary regimes. The Greek philosopher, Pythagarus imposed strict vegetarianism on his followers as long ago as 500 B.C. However it was not until the Vegetarian Society was established in 1847 that the name vegetarianism was formally adopted (Beadsworth and Keil, 1997: 219). For the more extreme animal welfarist, the Vegan Society was started in 1944 (Frisch, 1994: 194). The 1980s

[2] One common animal right's T-shirt allegedly quotes Leonardo di Vinci proclaiming that: "In times to come, man will look upon the slaughter of an animal in the same way as he looks at the killing of a human."

began to see an increase in the number of people becoming vegetarian, with the numbers of vegetarians doubling over the decade from 1984 to 1994 (Vegetarian Society figures cited in Anon1, 1995). The Vegetarian Society says that it is currently recruiting around 5,000 new members per week (cited on Radio One Newsbeat, 1998). Now closely linked to environmentalism, vegetarianism is continuing in its tradition as an embodied system of social politics[3].

Two research agencies were established in the late 1980s to deal with the consumer's desire for information about ethical products. Both New Consumer and Ethical Consumer Research Association produced books which allowed the consumer to compare companies through their social and environmental policies, with ECRA producing an ethical *'Which?'* type quarterly magazine rating certain product areas. The 1990 government White Paper on the environment *'This Common Inheritance'* caught the essence of this consumer movement and followed in Friends of the Earth's footsteps by suggesting the use of consumer choice to exert pressure for change. Unremarkable in itself, this minor statement in a government paper had effectively changed the moral positioning of the consumer from self-concern to consumer sovereignity, and yet the consumer still had little ability to understand the complex systems of modern production in order to make fully informed choices. The E.U. moved to correct this inadequecy by establishing the "Eco-label", which would offer a set of certified environment friendly goods. The Eco-labelling Board has now been quietly subsumed into the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions, having only awarded nine eco-labels.

After a decade of international protocols on the environment, 1992 saw the international community meet in Rio for the Earth Summit. It was widely rumoured that the Third World had agreed not to mention First World over-consumption in return for there being no discussion on over-population, and yet when Agenda 21 was finally published it contained large sections on each. The document endorsed the need to change consumption practices in the First World and thereby explicitly, and internationally, made the links between the consumer and the environment. In the shopping centre, green consumerism had reached a peak at the end of the 1980s and the number of people stating that they bought green products began to fall. The media were content to portray this as an impact of the recession, which

[3] For a more detailed discussion about environmental and animal welfare movements see Macnaghten and Urry (1998: 62-74) and Jamison (1996).

also represented the mainstreaming of green products, and the slight internalisation of environmental protection into the production process (Simonian, 1995). However, for Government, retailers and environmental pressure groups it confirmed the difficulties inherent in trying to persaude the consumer to act on environmental issues. The Government are now beginning to introduce minimum environmental standards for products, rather than trying to reform the consumer (Bedford and Burgess, 1999).

Despite the slowing of green consumerism, the number of consumers selecting goods through some form of production values remained constant: green consumerism had shifted to ethical consumerism (Mintel I, 1994: 87). Ethics as the buzz concern of the 1990s showed a marked similarity to the green concerns of the 1980s (Jury, 1997, Simonian, 1994) in the response from producers, retailers and government, as well as the pattern of consumer practices. Supermarkets had introduced their own vegetarian and green symbols, which offered an additional, although unclarified, resource to the Vegetarian Symbols and the Eco-label. The Fair Trade Foundation moved to fill the gap in ethical markings by establishing a fair trade mark. Maya Gold chocolate gained the first Fair Trade Mark, and there are now over twenty Fair Trade Marked products in circulation (Nicholson-Lord, 1997). Fair trade goods became more widely available than they ever had been before, with at least one fair trade outlet in every major town in Britain (Barratt Brown, 1993: 169). Christian Aid published the '*Global Supermarket*' in 1993, which emphasised the conditions of labour behind the products on the supermarket shelf, and placed the retailers under pressure to reform their trading practices. Transnationals had been at the rhetorical forefront of ethical production standards, and were now beginning to be judged upon those standards (Anon2, 1996): Premier Brands came under attack for the conditions on their tea plantations, and responded by converting Typhoo tea into a fairly traded product (Dickenson, 1993). The pressure to internalise an element of ethical standards in the 1990s mirrored the green pressure of the 1980s.

Intensive farming had already come strongly into question, with the result that the RSPCA had set up a new standard for food products - Freedom Foods, when the issue of live exports brought out a whole new group of protesters against production techniques. In stark contrast to the young radicals of the environmental

demonstrations, the 1995 animal welfare demonstrations contained middle-aged, middle-class, middle-England protesters, ensuring that the issue became newsworthy (Anon1, 1995). With the environment dropping out of media attention, ethics provided new moral ground, and campaigns became headline news: for example, the Daily Star ran a two page leading article on the use of slave labour in Nike factories (Bond, 1995). Even the leading stars of ethical retailing, Body Shop, came under high profile media attack for their ethical records, and with the introduction of the wholey organic supermarket, Planet Organic in 1995 (Stummer, 1997) and the opening of a chain of ethical supermarkets, Out of This World, an ethical image became a desirable commodity for the big retailers. Not satisfied with opening their doors to Fair Trade Marked products, the supermarkets started to court ethical standards. Tesco announced that they had set up a 70 strong team of ethical advisers (Castle, 1997), and Sainsbury's and Co-op introduced a "radical" new code of conduct, agreed with their suppliers, in 1998 (Nicholson-Lord, 1997). Although fair trade still only accounts for £25million of the £100billion worth of annual trade (EFTA, 1995), 1990s concern with ethics has caught the political imagination in the same way as environmentalism did in the 1980s. Clare Short made good a pre-election promise to bring ethics into the mainstream by publishing a White Paper to promote an ethical trading initiative (Jury, 1997). Whatever the market value of ethical consumerism, its impact has been far-reaching.

Who are the ethical consumers?

Jo is 69 years old. She is a retired teacher with four full-grown kids and lives alone in London. She describes herself as poor but happy and has to continue tutoring children privately in order to supplement her "very small pension". The rest of her time is divided between gardening, travelling, birdwatching and conservation work. She is interested in all forms of performance arts, and is a practicing Christian. Although she does own a car, she cycles a lot and has joined her daughter on road protests.

Despite the continuous out-pouring of market research reports on the green and ethical consumer "... a mystery surrounds their numbers, as well as their shopping habits" (Cunningham, 1996). The soft-hearted (Gallup, 1995), affluent green (NCC, 1996), hardcore green and ethical (Henley Centre, 1997 cited by Harrison, 1998), deep-green and strongly ethical (Mintel, 1994) consumer accounts for respectively

28%, 19%, 10% and 16% of the population. Although these figures offer a confusion of years, issues, beliefs and stated practices, what they do show is the variety of answers obtainable from "representative" surveys. Whereas it is encouraging to think that 55% of the population would be greener consumers if the market would only allow them (Boulton, 1996)[4]; reassuring to know that 86% of people welcomed fair trade products, with 73% willing to pay more for them (Christian Aid cited in Anon4, 1993); and positively over-whelming to learn that 97% of the country believe that animals should be treated humanely, with 11% believing that it is wrong ever to kill an animal for food (Gallup, 1995)[5], it is all a complete nonsense in any practical terms. Fair trade chocolate was swept back off supermarket shelves after sales failed to materialise (Powell, 1995), vegetarianism stands at around 4.5% of the population according to Vegetarian Society 1995 figures (Anon1, 1995), and in practice it is estimated that only 1% of us shop in a socially responsible way once a month (Cunningham, 1996).

Given the abyss between estimated numbers of ethical consumers and actual sales figures, it is doubtful whether the details of characteristics propounded by the market research surveys has any basis in reality. However, for the sake of completeness, here goes. The National Consumer Council survey '*Shades of Green*' separated people into five different categories. The affluent greens who believed that there should be more information available about products, and more environmentally friendly products in general were typically females in high status jobs, in the age group 25-50. They were backed up by a further 17% of the population going under the heading of "Young Greens". This group were the unemployed and students, who were unable to afford to contribute to green consumerism, and yet held strong beliefs in consumer power. Typically the sceptics were of all ages, but low incomes (Boulton, 1996). Mintel's Green Consumer I and II survey showed that women were slightly more likely to purchase green and ethical products than men, and significantly more likely to buy animal welfare products than men (61% as opposed to 42%), and mothers are supposedly more likely to buy green products out of their concern for future generations (Heelas, 1991: 221, Peattie, 1992: 118, Ottman, 1992: 42). For all the issue areas the 15-19 age range had the highest percentage of consumers, and the over 65s the

[4] Particularly if the Mori survey of international consumers and Eurobarometer's 1992 survey of Europeans and the Environment are correct in their assessment that 54% and 57% of Britons are already buying green products (Anon3, 1995).
[5] With 52% deterred from buying products through animal welfare concerns (Mintel, 1994).

lowest, and this age profile has been recognised in terms of green consumerism for some time (Young, 1989, De Boerr, 1993, Griffith, 1993). As a generalisation the young were more swayed by environmental concerns and the middle-aged by ethical issues, such as oppressive regimes and fair trade (Mintel I, 1994: 26). London and the South were revealed as the areas where one would be most likely to find any of the concerned consumers, who are statistically more likely to be from the higher and middle-income brackets, although D and E classified consumers reported only slightly less inclination to purchase products than the other categories (Mintel I, 1994: 19-30, also Coddington, 1993). The Gallup survey about people's attitudes towards animals found that soft-hearted people, who believed that animals should be treated like humans, and vegetarians were disproportionately women, whereas the animal unfriendly "brutes" were almost exclusively men (King, 1995).

This aporia of market research surveys leaves little room for an accurate picture of the ethical consumer. My own questionnaire (Appendix A), sampling 446 ethical consumers, reveals that my interviewees were part of a group in which 82% of the sample were home owners, with only 11% of the respondents viewing themselves as on a low income. Seventy percent of the ethical consumers were educated to degree level or above, and 23% were employed in work relating to the issues involved in ethical consumerism. The bulk of the respondents were aged between 31 and 50 (51.5%), with only 18% under the age of 30. The majority of the sample (63%) were female, with 98% being white. Forty eight percent of the ethical consumers identified themselves as "not at all religious", although 76% saw themselves as spiritual people. Whereas 85.5% of the respondents regularly bought environmentally friendly products, only 53.5% were vegetarian. More people classified themselves as having allegience to Labour than any other political party, and *The Guardian* and *The Independent* proved to be the most popular newspapers, read by 44% of the sample.

Moving away from the opinions of commentators and market researchers, to more in-depth academic studies of ethical consumers, there are attempts to complicate the image of the female, well-off, young ethical consumer. Work done by Willetts and Keanes (1995: 41) confirms this female skewed tendency to vegetarianism in their work on healthy eating and add white, age 20-39, and middle-class to their list

of characteristics. However, Dietz, Frisch and Stern (1993), and Burgess, Harrison and Filius (1993) found that vegetarianism and green consumerism respectively, were more related to some sense of altruism than to age, gender, income or education. Social psychologists have pointed to underlying psychological characterists such as open-mindedness (Karp, 1996) or post-material values (Grob, 1995).The inability of research to paint a credible picture of the ethical consumer, both in terms of numbers and usable information, argues a fundamental paucity of knowledge about the intrinsic nature of the ethical consumer. Regardless of the numbers who do in fact buy ethical goods regularly, the huge numbers of people who claim to choose some goods through ethics, and certainly the reaction of producers keen to appease these consumers, would suggest that the use of ethical mediation would be of primary importance to contemporary consumption studies. The reality of the situation is that, with a few notable exceptions – in particular consumer behaviour, marketing books and social psychologists – this new, but certainly politically important, phenomenon has been largely ignored by academics.

Why do ethical consumers not consume ethical products?

In the early 70s, Jo used to run bring and buy mornings to raise money for Christian Aid, but she didn't start to think about what she consumed until after her youngest son got involved with a campaign to force his university to stop investing in South Africa in the 80s. Jo buys fair trade products from Traidcraft if she has the time to travel there, although she admits that she does like to indulge in certain other sorts of tea and coffee, and in fact does have some Nescafé on her shelf. Although she is nearly a vegetarian, she claims that she never bought animal welfare products. Instead, she avoids a lot of meat products because of the damage that cattle ranching was doing to the rain forests, and has a general dislike of pesticide use and the removal of hedges. When her kids come home she tends to cook a roast dinner, which she regards as a treat for them all, as they eat very little meat between them. She tries to buy as much organic food as possible, but is unsure quite what constitutes organic dairy products. Her cleaning products are mostly Ecover, which she buys in bulk and then takes the containers back to the health food shop to be refilled. She likes Body Shop and Boots toiletries, but her favourite soap is Yardley lavender.

As I have been writing this chapter, one of the main headlines on the Radio One

news was the information that a bacon company had commissioned a survey that found that half of all vegetarians ate bacon sandwiches. This agreed with the findings of other reports (for example, Willetts and Keanes, 1995), and concluded that the vegetarian obviously could not resist meat (report by Danish Bacon cited on Radio One Newsbeat, 3-3-98). And here is one of the most fundamental and least understood aspects of the ethical consumer, as the huge discrepancy between the numbers of people who report that they consume ethically and the numbers who actually do show, believing in consuming ethically and actually consuming ethically are two completely different things.

Several theories have been offered, in particular by social psychologists, giving reasons why consumers are unable to begin to take ethics into account with any consistency, although these have mostly been in relation to green consumerism. Price is the obvious first barrier, and it is assumed that environmental goods have been largely the domain of the affluent consumer (Jacobs, 1991: 43). Internalising the externalities means that environmentally friendlier products, and indeed fair trade products have a price premium[6], and there is no straight forward link between higher costs and a consumer's willingness to pay: surveys by Environmental Research Associates revealed that shoppers found higher prices only acceptable on 6% of green products, the majority of which were toiletries and detergents (cited in Griffith, 1993). Burgess et al (1993: 159) found the freedom to buy green products was more complex than a simple price barrier, with green consumerism being an affordable luxury to be met after other conditions and concerns had been satisfied. Thus, believing that it is important to consume ethically, and rating it as important in comparison to other issues in everyday life are two different things. The need to view ethical consumerism as a part of a series of other consumer concerns is evident in the suggestion that convenience plays a large part in the selection of non-green products (Ottman, 1992: 40, Ungar, 1994) and Jack's (1991) emphasis of the importance of brand loyalty and the quality of the products.

One of the most complex factors involved in the debates about consumer motivations is the relationship of knowledge to ethical consumerism. Whilst some commentators have stressed the need for more information for the consumer to be able to make ethical decisions (Ekins, 1989: 12), this would not automatically

[6] Although in a price survey Ethical Consumer found that 9 out of 15 tested ethical brands were the same price or cheaper than their conventional, brand name counterparts (Collis, 1997: 27).

guarantee any increase in ethical consumption. Much of the thinking was based on the problems of false green claims, such as the introduction of "phosphate free" washing up liquid towards the end of the 80s - even though EC regulations had always insisted on washing up liquid being phosphate free (Young, 1989), and as consumer trust in green claims fell to 43% in the 90s introducing eco-labelling was seen as essential (Coddinton, 1993: 95). This may well have been the case, as green consumerism has been mediated by the need to feel efficable if one is to be willing to take personal responsibility instead of leaving action to governments and regulators (Newhouse, 1990, Axelrod and Lehman, 1993, Eden, 1995). However, Mintel have found that those purchasing ethical products reported no less confusion about issues than those who did not (Mintel II, 1994: 87), and in the case of animal welfare Gallup's findings suggest that the more the individual knows about animals the less likely they are to be concerned about the nature of human-animal interactions (King, 1995).

In interpreting the disparity between those who express concern for animal welfare and those who act on their concern Anthony King concludes that the consumers are "...not thinking clearly and are not being entirely honest even with themselves" (King, 1995). If we include the 35% of consumers who have reported not changing their consuming habits to be in line with their ethics (Mintel II, 1994: 21), and the many more who remain unquantified if Cafod is correct when it states that nine people out of ten see ethical shopping as a top priority (cited in Manchester Evening News, 1997), then either Britain is a fundamentally dishonest nation, or making ethical choices is a far more complex process than King has assumed. Given the complexity of the ethics which Jo has applied to her food choices, it is understandable that actions should not be easy to determine, especially from surveys which are unable to ask open ended questions, or even to be sure about what are the right questions to ask. What the market surveys and academic work concerning ethical consumers does show is that price, knowledge, convenience, efficacy and desire have to be looked at alongside the rest of a consumer's values and practices in order that we can understand consumers' motivations and inconsistencies. As Simonian points out "...amid the forest of reports ... remarkably little has appeared about what consumers think" (Simonian, 1995). Furthermore, there is a need to understand why anybody was unproblematically assuming that

consumers should act with consistency in the first place[7]. The consumption studies literature has to be reviewed within the context of theories pertaining to ethics, and value and belief systems, to establish whether there is any foundation for anticipating consistent behaviour in the ethical consumer.

Why are ethical consumers important?

Since Jo has begun to consume ethically she sees ethical consumerism and the accompanying ideologies as have had a large impact on Government and society. She points out that her grandchildren are now taught about the environment at school, and have environmental awareness trips to the Body Shop factory. She believes that society is beginning to learn about the importance of consumer ethics, and that in time many more people will become ethical consumers, especially the schoolchildren of today, and this in turn will force many more businesses to take ethics into account.

I shall use this section to consider why the study of ethical consumers is important both for the wider political debate and for academic debates. Consumers have forced retailers into retreat over the introduction of genetically modified foods, and the demand for organic produce continues to increase rapidly (Stummer, 1997). However, Government-led consumer change campaigns such as the 1998-1999 *"are you doing your bit"* campaign have been criticised by House of Commons select committee review as "inadequate" (DETR, 2000). Public behaviour modification campaigns are notoriously difficult to make effective (Carman, 1992). Even such high profile food scares as BSE create only temporary adjustments to consumer behaviour (Reilly, 1999). In following the reaction to food safety scares, the Glasgow Media Group found that BSE was not enough to instigate major behaviour changes, and whereas there was much talk by their respondents about becoming vegetarian, in fact few did, and only then as a temporary measure (Reilly, 1999).

Where does the ethical consumer lie in relation to the Government, campaigning groups, producers and retailers in the production of ethical consumerism? Whilst the Government begins to introduce new guidelines to encourage ever greater

[7] Especially for animal welfare concerns. Rather than admitting that vegetarians may sometimes eat meat a spokesperson for the Vegetarian Society categorically rebuked Danish Bacon's claims (Newsbeat, 1997).

consumer responsibility over the environment (DETR, 2000), there is little to suggest that the consumer will be easily motivated to change their behavioural patterns. What then inspires the potential ethical consumer to become an actual ethical consumer? The paucity of research surrounding the ethical consumer, and the need to view the ethical consumer both by individual issues and as someone who is motivated to act on issues as a whole, mean that little is known about whether ethical consumerism is a producer or consumer led phenomenon. Cultural studies of the commodity system emphasise the more complex interplay of producer and consumer in determining the nature of commodity systems (McRobbie, 19849; Jackson, 1999, Miller, 1989, McCracken, 1988). Whilst the research has tended to concentrate on issues of fashion and style, there is a clear lack of research which reveals the complex networks of production, provision and consumption which embed ethical consumerism (one exception is Thorne and Whatmore, 1997).

In 1999, I and Jacquie Burgess were commissioned by the British Retail Consortium, the leading lobbying group for the major British retailers, to research how environmental responsibility was constructed and practiced throughout the chain of production, provision and consumption (Bedford and Burgess, 1999). The study was a novel attempt to situate the consumer within the context of the commodity chain. A total of 11 focus groups were convened with conventional consumers, Government bodies and regulators, suppliers, non-governmental organisations and some of the country's major retailers. The environment formed the central focus of the research, although fair trade groups were included, and animal welfare issues were touched upon.

The research revealed an interesting position for the ordinary consumer. Whilst consumers themselves felt that they were driving the environmental agenda in business, aided by the campaigning organisations, all the other actors in the circuit believed that the consumer was rarely likely to be motivated on environmental issues. Those campaigns which were successful tended to involve consumer health or animal welfare. But an overall change in consumer behaviour (for example to reduce consumption practices involved in climate change) was viewed as unfeasible by Government and NGOs alike. Environmental pressure groups and consumer associations explained that media campaigning was rarely likely to

promote consumer action for the environment[8], and was instead aimed at changing public opinion. Therefore, for many of the environmental campaigns in the public spotlight, the retailers are reacting[9] more to public opinion than positive market incentives. This, in turn, ensures that consumer-related environmental issues are likely to have a larger impact than the purchasing practices of green consumers.

However, the retailers have strong reasons for changing aspects of their practices even without the incentive of sales. Firstly, the retailers and suppliers are keen to protect their brand image, and any retailer reacting to an environmental campaign for short-term gain drives other retailers to follow. Moreover, NGOs are aware of the desire to protect brand image, and are likely to choose certain retailers on whom to target their campaigns. Secondly, the retailers will react to public opinion which appears set to influence Governments to introduce regulation. Furthermore, as retailers increasingly represent the voice of the consumer to Government circles (Marsden, 1995), they are eager not to been seen to act in opposition to consumer opinion, and lose their powerful position. Finally, those consumers who do react to environmental and social issue campaigns are individuals the retailers wish to retain. The profile of the customers of the Co-operative bank since the bank began to trade on an ethical image have become the envy of the business sector - professional, middle-class, well-educated with high disposable income (Bedford and Burgess, 1999).

It is not the intention of this thesis to place the ethical consumer in the context alongside other actors in the commodity system - although this is undoubtedly a research agenda which needs to be undertaken given the current lack of knowledge as to the origins of multi-ethic consumerism. Instead the thesis will examine the reasons that a small sample of ethical consumers interviewed gave for beginning to consume ethically; what information and groups influenced those decisions; and how the ethical consumer uses information to construct their own consumer practices. This in turn will suggest how individuals integrate ethics into the situated consumption practices of their everyday lives. The research focuses

[8] However, in contrast, fair trade and animal welfare were viewed by related NGOs and retailers as consumer driven - although obviously with campaigning groups promoting the practice.

[9] The retailers, and to some extent the suppliers (although obviously they are increasingly constrained by retailer specifications) were quite open about the fact that environmental issues were taken on board as a reaction rather than a proactive creation of a market. This concurs with Eden's 1993 findings of retailer environmental responsibility.

on committed ethical consumers, rather than those who made occasional ethical purchases, to demonstrate the level of motivation and commitment necessary for the individual to begin to undertake sustainable consumption.

When I began this thesis, there were very few academic studies into ethical consumerism outside of social psychology's interest in environmental behaviour. Sustainable consumption emerged on political agendas following the 1992 Earth Summit, but was neglected not least by academics who had previously ignored consumption in favour of the more "serious" phenomenon of production (Miller, 1995). Personal sustainable consumption became subordinate to national sustainable consumption as an economic phenomenon. The few studies that did consider individual practices tended to concentrate on green consumerism (Harrison, Burgess and Filius, 1996; Eden, 1995) or vegetarianism (Keanes and Willetts, 1995), rather than ethical consumerism. Over the last few years, ethnographic studies of consumption found it difficult to ignore informants' references to ethical consumption (for example, Lunt and Livingstone, 1992; Lunt, 1995; Miller, 1995; Cook and Crang, 1996; Bell and Valentine, 1997). Such research suggests that consumers were now more aware of the origins of their commodities than had previously been assumed.

At the same time as recognising a discursive shift towards consumer ethics, consumption studies which celebrate the Western consumer's diversity of lifestyle choices, have had to defend their position from attack by political economists, environmentalists and feminist theorists arguing that consumption cannot be understood outside of its wider social and environmental impacts (for example Perrons, 1999 and McRobbie, 1997). Geographers in particular have been keen to emphasise the need to reunite production and consumption (most obviously Hartwick, 1999). Recent years have seen conferences begin to address ethical consumerism[10]. Ethical consumerism as an academic agenda in a postmodern age is an attractive proposition: it allows for an unfettered capitalism, and a continued celebration of consumer culture, whilst at the same time appearing to have a political agenda or a moral justification. Ethical consumers are increasingly being suggested as the answer to environmental and developmental issues (Miller, 1995, Hartwick, 1999) without a rigorous examination of the ethical consumers' potential.

[10] For example, the meeting meetings at the Centre for Environmental Studies at Oxford, 1998, and the Lancaster summer school on ethical consumerism, 1999.

Is the ethical consumer empowered under capitalism? Are ethical consumers particularly empowered, or is it possible that all consumers can eventually become ethical consumers? Indeed, are ethical consumers part of a political process at all? This thesis will begin to examine the ethical consumer, to suggest that ethical consumerism needs to be more fully analysed before it should be celebrated as the next step in consumer society.

Introduction to consumption studies

Whereas consumption had formerly been ignored as a study of meaningful practice, in favour of the more serious nature of production, recent times have seen a deluge of new studies. Both Miller (1996) and Gregson (1995) highlight the increasing emphasis on consumption. The majority of the theoretical literatures employed in this thesis form an integral part of the empirical chapters, where quotes from interviewees are examined in relation to relevant theoretical writings. This literature review, therefore, is an extremely targeted review which aims to provide the reader with an introduction to the theoretical literatures and research questions. Rather than a comprehensive overview, it is then a set of starting points. This section introducing consumption, looks at three sets of literatures positioning the consumer variously as a dupe or a hero; an identity seeker; or a moral agent.

Consumer as dupe/hero

The consumer of neo-liberal economics has traditionally been viewed as rational economic man (Ekins, 1992). Slater (1997: 46) describes the corresponding system of economics as "economic amoralism", where it is assumed that needs and morality are formed by society and religion, and are therefore not the result of economic factors. It was this understanding of a market removed from need creation which Galbraith (1958: 135) famously argued against. Instead, he suggested that the *raison d'etre* of advertising was to promote needs, as advertising would only be effective if the individual was far removed from her own wants. This understanding of the manipulated consumer of mass consumer society found favour with, among others, Packard (1960) and the Frankfurt School. Marcuse (1964) offered a poetic description of the consumer as a dupe, whose very needs have been pre-conditioned by society:

> "False needs are those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice. The result then is euphoria in

> unhappiness. Most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to this category of false needs." (Marcuse, 1964: 5)

Adorno and Horkheimer (1972), also from the Frankfurt School, envisioned the further duping of the consumer by the "culture industry", which extended the realm of commodities into the realm of leisure and art. High culture became replaced by mass culture, in which the subordination of use-value to exchange-value allowed advertising to manipulate the commodity form for their own ends (Featherstone, 1995: 18)[11].

Critiques of the consumer as dupe include the inability to separate true from false needs, and the real pleasure gained by the masses from these new cultural forms (Featherstone, 1995: 20). More particularly, the work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (the CCCS) demonstrated the ability of sub-cultural groupings to resist the hegemonic reading of mass produced culture, by appropriating and transforming commodity signs from the parent culture (see in particular Hebdige, 1976). These rituals of resistance through the semiotics of style, therefore, allowed the (young, working class, male) consumer an identity distinct from the dominant culture (Jackson, 1989: 59). More recent work by de Certeau (1984) and Fiske (1989) also focus on the empowerment of the consumer through subversive activities. For de Certeau (1984) the consumer is spontaneously capable of minor acts of resistance, whereas for Fiske (1989: 24-26) a feeling of empowerment is achieved through the ability to reject goods. These readings of consumer as a resistant hero have similarly been critiqued. Miller (1987) suggest that de Certeau and Fiske fail to appreciate the mundane nature of shopping, whereas the CCCS have been criticised for "creating" as much as researching their sub-cultures, and for neglect by the role of the female consumer (Slack and Whitt, 1992: 578).

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[11] I will not be providing a detailed analysis of the critiques and endorsements of advertising (instead see Haug, 1986; Schudson, 1984; Williams, 1960; Myers, 1986 and Jhally, 1990). Neither do I wish to continue the debate about true and false needs, or wants and needs (see Leiss, 1976 and Myers, 1986 for a critique of the distinctions). However, it should be noted that whereas contemporary consumption studies have rejected the need/want dichtomy, many commentators involved in environmentalism continue to criticise the creation of needs (Durning, 1992 and Parkin, 1998). Nor have environmentalists given up hope of developing Maslow's need hierarchy to allow for a culturally sensitive determination of needs (see Ekins and Max-Neef, 1992).

Current conceptions of the consumer tend to approve a more ordinary notion of the consumer, situated within mass consumer culture, but able to appropriate meanings and goods for their own ends. Miller (1987) uses the example of children's relationship to sweets to demonstrate how children conspire with producers to develop ever more "disgusting" sweets, rather than being manipulated. Jackson and Taylor (1996) suggest that advertising puts across a preferred meaning, but now leaves space for the consumer to produce their own meaning. New studies of consumption in geography have begun to move away from the carnavalesque, and the shopper as flaneur (Gregson, 1995: 137; Gregson and Crewe, 1997: 242), to look at the more mundane forms of shopping, such as car boot sales, supermarkets and shopping centres (Gregson and Crewe, 1997; Humphries, 1998; Miller, Jackson, Thrift, Holbrook, and Rowlands, 1998). These studies of the consumer as shopper, have situated consumers within familial and social contexts, and have suggested that the consumer feels neither empowered nor manipulated, with both pleasure and frustration resulting from the shopping trip (Humphries, 1998: 192-199).

This brief history of the role of consumer as hero or dupe is of importance to the theorisation of the ethical consumer. Gabriel and Lang (1995: 171) write approvingly that the ethical consumer as an activist shows that right and wrong, and needs and wants are not concepts which can be ignored in their consumption practices. If this is true then should the ethical consumer be considered as a hero of consumption rejecting the values of mass consumer culture, or is she simply manipulated into responding to a different set of hegemonic media discourses? Does the act of ethical consumerism allow the consumer to feel pleasure and empowerment, or has a rejection of mass culture limited their resources for self-fulfilment? This study of ethical consumers aims to understand the consumers relationship to consumption and shopping, and thereby to position the ethical consumer in relation to contemporary debates about the freedom of the consumer.

Consumer as identity-seeker

Consumption is now frequently seen as a more empowering source of identities than production (Miller, 1995: 42). Self-identities and social identities are constructed through consumption, as part of sub-cultural or group membership, lifestyle affiliations and the reflexive project of the self (Gabriel and Lang, 1995).

Here, rather than providing a detailed account of the vast array of writings on identity, the aim is to provide a starting point both for examining the meaning of ethical consumption for the identities of ethical consumers, and for analysing the role of identity processes in ethical consumption. I shall therefore, begin with the idea that individuals have multiple social identities and lifestyles which are fluid and in constant flux, leaving them contextual and socially dependent (Jackson, 1992: 215). More specifically, I will explore the differences between two very circumscribed notions - of a centred sense of self and a decentred self - before briefly touching on some of the more pessimistic postmodern theories of identity which present the self as fragmented and depthless. Such differences between centred and decentred selves could be avoided for the generality of consumption theories, but are important in the study of ethical consistency, as I shall demonstrate by complementing the consumption and identity theories with corresponding ethics and identity theories. After this brief introduction to identity, I shall consider the use of consumption for sub-cultural identities, lifestyle commitments, and self-identity.

Freud, Marx and Lacan began the shift away from the notion of an essentialised self, which one uncovers, to the now accepted belief in the self as socially constructed, and as composed of identities which are constructed in discourse (Hall, 1996: 5). At the individual level, identities are an answer to the question "who am I in relation to other people?" and at the group level an answer to the question "who are we in relation to other groups?" (Mach, 1993: 4). From the earliest stage of recognising that we are not the other, who we are has to be about who we are not. Moreover, it is not a finished project, but an on-going process of identification (Hall, 1992: 287). The symbolic interactionist, Mead (?), posited that identity was formed in the interaction between a core self, or "real me" inside, and society outside. The self does not stay consistent, but is transformed by the internalisation of the meanings and values of our external identities. We become absorbed into society's structure.

Rather than believing that we have a core self to be uncovered Giddens (1991), highly influenced by Taylor's (1991) theorisation of an ethical self, constructs self-identity in a slightly different way. In a now famous quotation Giddens states:

> "In the post-traditional order of modernity, and against the backdrop of new forms of mediated experience, self-identity becomes a reflexively organised endeavour. The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered though abstract systems" (Giddens, 1991: 5).

This narrative of self-identity is one among many that could have been chosen, and the traits from which the person constructs their biography will vary socially and culturally (Giddens, 1991: 55). Crucially, Giddens maintains a belief in two points. Firstly, every individual preserves a difference between their self-identities and the various identity performances which are contextual (Giddens, 1991: 58). Secondly, the self is not a shell that can be changed into any form, it has specific psychological traits which centre the whole (Giddens, 1991: 75). Hence, for Giddens:

> "... individuals adjust both appearance and demeanour somewhat according to the perceived demands of the particular setting. That this is so has led some authors to suppose that the self essentially becomes broken up - that individuals tend to develop multiple selves in which there is no inner core of self-identity. Yet surely, as an abundance of studies of self-identity show, this is plainly not the case." (Giddens, 1991: 100)

In comparison those who suggest a postmodern, decentred self, posit no stable sense of self or self-identity. Self-identity and social identity become indistinguishable (Jenkins, 1996: 17; Gabriel and Lang, 1995: 92; Langman, 1992: 40). For Langman (1992: 57), the decentred self uses identity to seek recognition from others. Badges of identity, chosen for their cultural meaning are used to create and display identity and group membership. Langman's subject has a constancy of temperament and habitus[12], much like Giddens' concept of constant demeanour of self, but what is emphasised is the only imaginary trans-situational stability of identity (Langman, 1992: 57). The individual depends upon recognition from its fragmented spectacles of self-presentation, and in this sense bridges the

[12] Bourdieu conceived the idea of the habitus. It is the process whereby the conditioning of aesthetic taste, produced through up-bringing and education, becomes embodied as unconscious preferences. This differentiation of class by taste through the use of 'cultural capital', can be converted into social power (Bourdieu, 1984). As the de-differentiation of high and low culture has taken place, and the over-production of signs begins to make classifications less recognisable, so class identity as a form of tyranny should be less manageable (Featherstone, 1991: 110). At present, many theorist such as Featherstone would argue both class taste and the diminution of the boundaries of class taste are noticable.

gap between the modern individual of Giddens and the seemingly soulless postmodern individuals of Baudrillard and Jameson.

For Jameson and Baudrillard, postmodern culture represents something far more sinister. The self becomes commodified into image, which is presented as a series of multiple surfaces (Jameson, 1984: 61-62). Rather than the alienated being of modernity, the postmodern self is depthless and fragmented. Baudrillard's (1988) individuals have to construct identities for themselves out of the flow of signs and images, with no fixed system of reference. Reality and image can no longer be separated and the self is reduced to simulacrum. The floating signs unattached to any signified leave no room for moral judgement (Featherstone, 1995: 43) The postmodern is into role-playing, subject to rapid change and constantly operates in the present, which itself has lost a separation between the real and the image (Kellner, 1992: 152-156).

In terms of the ability to maintain a consistency of ethical practice over a plurality spatial contexts, there are substantial differences between the centred ethical self and the decentred self. Taylor (1989: 15) argues that there are three main axes of moral thinking: obligation to others, understanding what constitutes a good life, and the requirements for individual dignity. For him, the current emphasis on the uncertainty about what constitutes a good life, and what offers the individual dignity, leaves the modern individual with the need to search for a meaningful identity. In articulating what we believe to be worthwhile, what we think offers us dignity and what we see as our moral obligations we make explicit the frameworks by which we live (Taylor, 1989: 26). We have these frameworks so that we know good from bad, can give meaning to action and differentiate the important from the trivial. Knowing who we are is to be oriented in a moral space which provides the background to these decisions (Taylor, 1989: 28). We are only an individual self among other selves because certain things matter to us. What matters to us and how it matters thereby defines identity (Taylor, 1989: 32). Moral frameworks do not stay fixed and our orientation in moral space includes an understanding not just of who I am now, but who I want to be and where I came from. However, over different spatial contexts this framework offers a consistent orientation towards the good. Over-riding values present the self with a "hypergood" through which all

other goods are judged. For Taylor, what results is an ethical self capable of making strong moral evaluations.

In contrast, Rorty (1991) follows a postmodern line arguing that we have no coherent self beneath our social identities. Instead, we are a decentred set of quasi-selves. Everyone of these quasi-selves has a network of desires and beliefs, with different selves often being mutually incompatible. However, at any one time only one of these selves is likely to be engaged in introspective thought, and therefore is unaware of the contingency of the decentred self (Smith, 1996: 112). Rather than having a framework for a strong evaluation of the moral good, in any one situation each different self will make a weak evaluation, with the outcome of the decision being more of a preference, dependent on which self is involved in the decision. Rather than having an opinion on the moral good, the question becomes upon whom is my contingent reading of the good dependent (Smith, 1996: 112). The possibilities for a consistency of ethics in different contexts is thereby far less than for the centred self of Taylor.

In terms of consumption practices and identity formations, perhaps the strongest consumer affiliations are to a sub-cultural grouping. Although there is no agreed definition of a sub-culture (Thornton, 1997) it can be seen to imply an homology of style. There is a symbolic fit between the values and lifestyles of a sub-cultural group, with musical tastes often appearing as particularly important (Hebdige, 1979: 113). Moreover, these groups intentionally develop an identity separate from that of the hegemonic ideology, reworking the meanings of specific objects to communicate difference (Hebdige, 1979: 88-102). Those sub-cultures which are constructed to give voice to political protest depend upon the reworked meanings being generally decodable, and thereby feed back into the system of production and develop a stable place for the group in society through "rhetorical conformity" (McCracken, 1988: 133).

By contrast, the equally contestable notion of lifestyle, can be regarded as different to a sub-culture as it does not presuppose values of resistance (Jenkins cited in Chaney, 1996). Unlike social class, lifestyles are chosen through a stylistic self-consciousness (Featherstone, 1991: 83). They tend to cluster around shared values and concerns, and individuals invest their lifestyle choices with ethical or

political significance (Chaney, 1996: 91-96). Chaney (1996: 12) suggests: "...people use lifestyles in everyday life to identify and explain wider complexes of identity and affiliation.". These lifestyle then are one of the main ways of organising various social identities (Chaney, 1996: 101).

By using consumption as the primary means of identity formation, the individual ultimately has no choice but to choose to be a consumer (Giddens, 1994: 75; Slater, 1997: 91; Clarke,1998: 17). The project of the self becomes technicized, with commodity culture offering ever more solutions to the problem of identity (Bauman cited in Slater, 1997: 86). For sub-cultures and lifestyles, as for identity formation, the use of consumption implies that the sign-value or symbolic meaning of products has preference over the use-value (Chaney, 1996: 43, and Giddens and Beck cited in Warde: 1994). Of course there are dissenters from this view. Campbell (1995: 115) argues that individuals are neither aware of the economic nor the symbolic value of a variety of goods, and therefore not capable of using them to construct a desirable representation of the self to others. Warde (1994: 891) similarly disagrees with the consumption-identity problematic, arguing that "almost all recent accounts of consumption exaggerate the part that establishing self-identity plays in the process". Instead of a constant, and anxiety inducing, choice of identities, Warde contends that consumers are operating within prevailing class-systems and long-standing beliefs about respectability. Moreover, consumers are often content to assert their sense of self over the symbolic trappings of self-presentation (Warde, 1994: 892).

There is, therefore, no unanimity on either the significance of identity to contemporary consumption practices, or the forms that such identity processes take. However, resolving such disagreements is not the aim of this thesis. In principle, I am unsure whether it is possible to produce a final resolution of such complex issues. The sociologies and geographies of consumption are plural. There are many different places and process of consumption, many different sorts of consumers, many different things and experiences which are consumed. In order to investigate the relationships between consumption and identity, and the ways in which they mutually constitute each other, I suggest a more grounded and textured analysis is needed. As such, these often over-generalised debates on consumption and identity figure in this thesis in two ways. Firstly, they form part of its rationale.

They point to the need to study forms of consumption, and groups of consumers, who apparently run against the grain of contemporary postmodern consumer cultures. As an aside, they also warn against assuming that ethical consumers simply fall on one side of the centred and decentred self battlelines. Secondly, these debates on consumption and identity also help to contextualise more specific questions that might be, and indeed are, asked of ethical consumers and their narratives. To summarise, this thesis is concerned with the narratives of the practice of ethical consumerism in everyday life, and thereby aims to understand the role of identity within ethical consumption. Existing, identity theories provide two issues which will be pursued throughout the empirical work. Firstly, to what extent is ethical consumerism simply a lifestyle choice, affiliation to a sub-culture, or favoured identity construction rather than being a value based set of practices? And has the ethical product as sign-value supplanted the ethical product as use or even exchange value? Secondly, does the ethical consumer demonstrate any trans-situational stability of consumption practices, and what does this mean for the ethical self?

Consumer as moral agent

In this final brief literature review I want to look at the relatively small amount of recent literatures which engage the consumer as moral agent.[13] I shall, therefore, review Etzioni's (1988) I+We paradigm for consumer behaviour, Miller's (1995, 1997, 1998) conceptions of shopping as an essentially moral practice, and the theories of a geography of commodities which allows for ethical connectivity between consumer and producer (see in particular Sack, 1993).

Etzioni as a communitarian has rejected the neoclassical economic ideal of the consumer acting in isolation. Instead he constructs a model in which the consumer is part of a social collective, within which she shares a sense of identity, that influences choice. The consumer then consumes both through an understanding of her deontological responsibility to the community, and in her own self-interest (theorised as pleasure by Etzioni). This 'I+We Paradigm' "assumes that individuals experience perpetual inner tension generated by conflicts among their various basic urges (or desires), among their various moral commitments, and between their urges and their moral commitments" (Etzioni, 1988: 11). Pleasure and morals

[13] I do not here propose to give a review of Weberian theories of hero ethics or Protestant work ethics. For a detailed account of consumer as hero see Featherstone, 1995.

are never in complete opposition, although the consumer whose behaviour is motivated by their moral commitments will behave "systematically and significantly" differently to those motivated by pleasure (Etzioni, 1988, 67). Therefore, rather than the primary decision-making functions being logical as for the rational economic man, they are influenced by social and moral norms. Etzioni never claims that his paradigm is the only paradigm in operation in consumer choice, although he does suggest that only a limited number of paradigms could be in operation for the sake of the consumer's sanity.

In showing that consumers are choosing between two or more utilities we can begin to have a clearer appreciation of the sometimes contradictory nature of the consumer. Every different site of consumption, or changing social situation will present the consumer with a new balance to the paradigm - logically offering limitless outcomes. That all consumers consume in part through their morals is an interesting challenge to the belief that consumption is the consummation of a duty to pleasure (Abercrombie, 1994; Bourdieu, 1984: 365; Baudrillard, 1970/1988: 48). Miller (1995 and 1998) similarly positions consumption as a moral practice. In his polemic on consumption as the vanguard of history, Miller (1995: 37) argues that the appeal of capitalism to hedonism and materialism is outweighed by the fact that the prime motivation of capitalism is the virtue of thrift, and moreover that consumption is an already deeply moral process, based around the home and family. Miller's later '*Theory of Shopping*' (1998) expands upon this thesis, arguing that rather than self-indulgent, consumption comes to be seen as an other directed act, where the consumers' primary concern is their relationship to significant others. Therefore: "What the shopper desires above all is for others to want and to appreciate what she brings" (Miller, 1998: 149).

However, Miller's interest in consumption and morality is not limited to the localised practices of consumption, and extends to the impact of consumption on producers. Miller (1995:10) argues that mass consumers now hold the balance of economic, and thereby, political power. He suggests that:

> "Today it is the process of consumption itself that must be engaged, through an act of self-revelation, into taking responsibility for the power that it wields without consciousness, and therefore largely without responsibility" (Miller, 1995: 19).

Although he continues to argue that the consumer as the (female) vanguard has transformed the world, he does not adjudge that it is the practices of ethical consumers that are likely to provide global equality (Miller, 1997a and b). Instead Miller points out that the power of the consumer over the producer is complex, with the link between the consumer and development being mediated by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. The consumer then, interacts with development theories which are constructed by the global financial institutions to represent the practices and values of First World consumer (Miller, 1997a: 43). Thus, whilst the ethical consumer may produce an increase in ethical products, this is but "a straw in the wind" (Miller, 1997a: 52).

Miller's suggestion that consumption has unconscious impacts echoes throughout much of the literature concerned to reunite consumption and production, both dealing with consumers' knowledges of the production processes (Harvey, 1996: Whatmore, 1998; Hartwick, 1998) and to prevent the redressing of the balance between studies of consumption and studies of production from creating a separation of the strands of the circuits of consumption or political economy (Jackson, 1999 and Perrons, 1999 respectively). Quotes from Harvey (1996) claiming that we are unaware of the conditions which lie behind our breakfast, and that of Jhally quoted earlier in this chapter about products appearing and disappearing before our eyes, have highlighted the veiling created by advertising and commodity fetishism. The power of advertising, and sign-value, to fetishise the relationship between the consumer and the producer is well-worked and critiqued. However, Pred (1998) has supplemented the commodity fetish of labour, to suggest a similar fetishisation of nature. Pred argues:

> "the contemporary decoupling of consumption from material nature is understood by those who - despite their critical bent, or even their sensitivities to the workings of capitalism - have reduced the study of consumption to a 'reading of culture', to an interpretation of either the symbolic expression and resistance of consumers, or to the semiotic content of commodities and shopping sites". (Pred, 1998: 153)

He suggests that the environment has come to exist as a nonpresent other, where "denaturalized" consumption is now a part of everyday life. This transformation of nature took place through the wants and needs of everyday life, which interfuse with hegemonic discourses of progress and superiority of humans over nature

(Pred, 1998: 160-162). Pred ends by asking how, having denaturalized consumption, are we to engage with our sociological and ecological future?

Hartwick (1998) has an answer concerning the fetishised relationship between consumer and producer. She uses Massey's (1993) theory of space as a simultaneous coexistence of social relationships at a variety of spatial levels to argue that we produce a liberative geography of consumption:

> "A liberative political geography of consumption thus has two urgencies. First, consumption should involve a 'geoknowledge' of the webs of interconnections which might be specified as commodity chains. Second, consumption should entail a 'geoethics', in which geographical knowledge is transformed into caring and responsibility for this world of interconnected people, practices, and environments. For political action is not about voting occasionally: it is about ethical daily praxis. And geopolitics does not just concern states: it is about reconnecting people in their everyday lives." (Hartwick, 1998: 434)

For Hartwick then, the consumer has a clear imperative to recognise their relationships to distant others, and to amend their everyday consumption practices accordingly. This 'geoknowledge' would provide information about the geography of commodities, to aid the consumer to get beneath the fetish. Should we begin to imagine a 'geoknowledge' that renaturalizes commodities as well? However, as Cook and Crang (1998) found in their research on food knowledges, the consumer has simultaneously a desire to know both more and less about the geographies of commodities. Given this ambiguity about product biographies, would the sudden influx of knowledges about production encourage the consumer to consume more ethically, or overwhelm and ultimately disempower her? In examining the practices of ethical consumers, I shall explore the level of knowledge that the consumer holds about her impacts on the environment and distant others. Furthermore, I shall address the forms that knowledge takes to recognise the ethical consumer's relationship to commodity fetishism and product information, and how this is transformed in to consumer responsibility. Hence, this thesis aims to provide a more grounded argument about the role of knowledge in the ethics of consumption.

Introduction to ethics

Recent times have seen a renewed interest in ethics in Geography (Smith, 1997), Sociology (Shilling and Mellor, 1998) and Cultural Studies (Slack and Whitt, 1992).

The postmodern agenda and feminist attempts to allow the moral voices of women have begun to create a new moral landscape, which appears to offer an open playing field for every social theorist to introduce their own readings of morality. Given the size of the literatures involved in moral philosophy, any account of ethics has to be extremely partial[14]. I shall here concentrate on two areas which have meaning for ethical consumerism. The first is the changing nature of ethical formulations, the shifting boundaries around what is considered moral, and the end of the prioritisation of reason over emotion, together with the consequences of these new ethical formulations for a geography of ethics. Secondly, I shall look at the literatures relating to ethics and action to identify issues necessary for the understanding of inconsistency between behaviour and concern.

Caring at a distance?

Modernity, with its grand narrative ideals, held that moral truth was universalisable and accessible through abstract, rational thought (Szersynski, 1996: 109). With a new understanding of the self as socially constructed, such universal ethics came to be regarded as power structures, legitimising a process of rationalisation which ignored the claims of different cultures and religions (Foucault cited in Lamb, 1995; Shields, 1991). Rather than being an autonomous moral agent able to dispassionately derive the moral right as imagined by Kant (Seidler, 1994: 178), the individual became seen as deriving her ethics from society:

> "The individual person invariably draws all his values, his norms and his moral concepts, from the world into which he has been born. And even if he rejects the entire value structure of a given society, items of this society will invariably have been internalized, to make themselves felt in due course in the demands of morality." (Heller, 1984: 77).

This recognition of the "thrownness" of moral thinking (Lash, 1994), led to an appreciation of social and cultural differences, encouraging an acceptance of relativism/particularism (Williams, 1976; Slack and Whitt, 1992: 571). An interest in ethics declined as moral certainty became replaced with a need for a situated reading of oppression.

[14] For an overview of theoretical positions in ethics see Singer, 1991. For an overiview of the geography of ethics see Smith, 1994.

The re-enchantment with moral theory is in part caught up with the move away from ethics as rationally and cognitively realised[15]. I shall here address a variety of literatures which have extended the reach of ethics away from instrumental rationality: feminist ethics of care; the new communitarians; and the works of the sociologist Bauman. The ethics of care have their roots in findings which are of a contentious nature to feminists (Tronto, 1993). Gilligan (1982) critiqued her research partner, Kohlberg's findings about the psychology of moral development. Kohlberg had established a hierarchy of thought in the solution of moral dilemmas. Gilligan suggested that the hierarchy reflected a particular notion of morality, and reanalysed the data to show that there were other voices to be heard. Although she deliberately avoided stating that her different voice was female, the critique was widely read as implying that women had a greater concern with the intersubjective nature of care than with ethical rationality. The work was subject to strong feminist critiques (Tronto, 1993), but an interest in the ethics of care allowed female morality, for example in the care for children or the sick, to be included within the realm of ethics. This allowed the impartiality of ethical reasoning to be supplemented with the feelings and emotions of a more empathic nature of morality.

At the same time the work of the social psychologist Solomon (1997a and b) began to deconstruct the binary of emotions and reason, to suggest that emotions were the bodily realised outcome of rational deliberation. It has become the mainstream view in philosophy that passion is no longer in opposition to reason (Griffiths, 1995: 97). Moreover, Harré (1986) argues that emotions are socially constructed along with moral values, where the breach of moral beliefs will result in the "hot cognition" or moral shock (Gamson, 1992) which informs the decision to act. While there remain boundaries as to what is included within the formulation of ethics (Griffiths, 1995: 99), the moral boundaries have begun to extend beyond reasoned argument.

This shift in moral boundaries has allowed for a more partial reading of morality, Whereas morality was previously premised on the notion of impartiality (Velleman,

[15] I do not wish to suggest that emotions have supplanted reason and rationality for all theorists. In particular note Giddens' (1991, 1994) formulation of cognitive reflexivity for the production of universals, and Habermas' (1990) use of reason in communicative ethics. See also Benhabib's (1990) critique of Habermas' rejection of emotions.

1999), the new communitarians have begun to argue for an acceptance of partiality in moral action. Communitarians reject liberal ideas of atomistic individuals (Sayer, 1996), arguing that self is relational, and constituted within communal practices (Silk, 1997). Individuals are, thereby, at times willing to place the communal good (we) before self-interest (I) (Etzioni, 1988). Etzioni's (1997) vision of communitarianism sees a socio-spatial hierarchy of moral duty which suggests that the self has rights before family, family before community, community before nation, and nation before other countries of the world. Moreover, he concludes that there is no sense in promoting a different vision of morality because humans put self and family first, once again arguing a shift away from reasoned impartiality.

Finally, I want to examine Bauman's (1993) thesis of postmodern morality as self for the other. For Bauman, postmodernity is characterised by the multitude of incompatible ethical ideals. It becomes impossible for the individual to live through any one ethical prescription, and instead the individual is subject to a continuous set of moral dilemmas for which the solution is simply a matter of personal choice (Bauman, 1993: 32). To argue for an ethical self, Bauman rejects a foundational ethics in favour of a pre-social empathic responsibility for the other. Bauman uses Levinas' formulation of responsibility, in which a face-to-face meeting produces a desire to take responsibility for the other, without expecting anything in return (for a fuller account see chapter four). Any attempt to produce a rationality for morality would result in a loss of this pre-social condition of self:

> "Morality is not safe in the hands of reason, though that is exactly what the spokesmen of reason promise. Reason cannot help the moral self without depriving the self of what makes the self moral: that un-founded, non-rational, un-arguable, no-excuse-given and non-calculable urge to stretch towards the other, to caress, to be for, to live for, happen what may. Reason is about making correct decisions, while moral responsibility precedes all thinking about decisions as it does not, and cannot care about any logic which would allow the approval of an action as correct. Thus morality can be 'rationalized' only at the cost of self-denial and self-attrition. From that reason-assisted self-denial, the self emerges morally disarmed, unable (and unwilling) to face up to the multitude of moral challenges and cacophony of ethical prescriptions. At the far end of reason, moral nihilism waits: that moral nihilism which in its deepest essence means not the denial of binding ethical code, and not the blunders of relativistic theory - but the loss of ability to be moral." (Bauman, 1993: 247)

Using emotion, empathetic responsibility and particularist notions of duty as a challenge to reasoned universals has strong implications for the issues dealt with in this thesis. For example, how and why should one care for a distant stranger (Corbridge, 1993) in the ethic of fair trade? Many geographers concerned with environmental issues and social justice have begun to incorporate readings of particularity into universiality (Harvey, 1996; Sayer and Storper, 1997; Low and Gleeson, 1997) and unite an ethics of care with an ability to care at a distance (Smith, 1998; Whatmore; 1997). Whatmore (1997: 49) suggests that a new appreciation of the proximity to actants needs to be developed to understand the ethical connectivities between consumer and the impact of her practices. Concurring with Harvey, she argues that issues of spatial and temporal scale are essential for building new ethical communities which are capable of recognising that distance is no longer an excuse for lack of ethical responsibility.

Smith (1998) similarly questions the impacts of these readings of morality as partiality, and what this means for a geography of ethics. He concludes that if we are to overcome the resurgence of ethical hedonism and communitarian hierarchies of duty, then an ethics of care must rest on more than empathic feeling. Instead, the partiality of care needs to be supplemented with more reasoned notions of justice to ensure the motivation to act out of concern for the distant other (Smith, 1998: 35). Of course ethical consumers are already motivated to act out of concern for the environment, for animal welfare and for the distant stranger involved in fair trade. Rather than begin to engage in the philosophical debate about appropriate ethical formulations then, this thesis aims to understand the role of ethics in creating a relationship between consumer self and distant other. In turn, it provides ways forward in understanding how: questions of reason and emotion intertwine and fuse; issues of morality are given meaning in the consumer's world; ethical distance is a complex cultural construction not a geographical fact, differently constructed in relation to the different others of environmental, animal welfare and fair trade concerns.

Ethical actions

I shall use this section to briefly look at the theories which relate to differences between ethics and action. Earlier in this chapter I used market research findings to demonstrate the difference between the reported concerns of consumers and their

purchasing decisions. I also suggested that I would return to look at theories relating to ethical action to see if it is reasonable to expect consumers to act in accordance with their ethics, and vegetarians to always be vegetarian. I want to introduce the theories of akrasia, value theory and planned behaviour to examine the long history of ethical inactivity.

The notion of akrasia was first developed by Aristotle (Rorty, 1997). Akrasia relates to the not following through of a held ethic. There are several reasons noted by philosophers for the occurrence of akrasia including loss of self-control, weakness of will and subconscious desires (Wilkerson, 1994: 181). In particular, Rorty (1997: 646) suggests that considered ethical judgements can be undermined by less justified desires which provide a more pressing concern. The individual is capable of self-deception, carrying out one set of practices whilst believing in the ethicality of a different set (Rorty, 1985: 127). Indeed, the individual is capable of "affected ignorance", deliberately choosing not to know about the impacts of their actions (Moody-Adams, 1994: 296). Moody-Adams argues that cultures are full of individuals who are uncritically committed to preserving their lifestyle, and therefore refusing to acknowledge the immorality of their practices. It is, therefore, possible to hold an ethical concern, but deny the relationship to the self. Moreover, value theory (Rokeach, 1973) theorises that not all values are equal in nature to the individual, hence any ethical action can be prevented by actions guided by values of greater importance to the self.

The differences between values and action has long been of interest to social psychologists. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), developed the Theory of Reasoned Action to predict behavioural intentions, after realising the limited amount of action likely to stem from personal beliefs. According to the theory, an individual's attitudes will only be transformed into behavioural intentions when they are in keeping with the person's perception of socially acceptable behaviour. Intentions to perform an action will then be an accurate prediction of their actions where these actions are under the individual's own volition (Terry and O'Leary, 1995). Where the actions are not under the individual's control a further factor determining the ability to act is added as the Theory of Planned Behaviour. However, even after acknowledging the complexities of the transfer from ethics to action, these models are only capable of explaining between 19% and 38% of behaviour (Sutton, 1998).

What is clear from theories of akrasia, and models of reasoned action, is that there is a lot more involved in ethical action than a belief in an ethic. This thesis is, therefore, interested in examining the circumstances that allow the ethical consumer to consume ethically, as well as the barriers to ethical consumption.

Introducing the thesis structure

Chapter Two is a review of the methodological framework used in researching the ethical consumers. I shall discuss the particularities of researching ethics, and suggest that whether to reveal your positionality or not when interviewing about ethics is a complicated decision. I shall justify the choice of individual in-depth interviews over in-depth groups, and explain the implications of looking through consumers' cupboards.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five are the empirical chapters, each providing a snap-shot of the ethical consumer from a different angle. Chapter Three details the stories about becoming an ethical consumer told by the interviewees. I shall place the decision to become an ethical consumer within a time-frame and cultural setting, and debate whether decisions to consume ethically are moral or an act of self-interest. Chapter Four brings together stories about the nature of the ethic, sources of knowledge and decisions about appropriate courses of action. I shall examine the knowledges the ethical consumers hold about issues and products, and the implications for purchasing decisions. The Final empirical chapter places ethical consumption in context to reveal the everyday negotiations that limit the likelihood of ethical purchases. I shall discuss the role of price, family, health and pleasure in the choice of products.

Chapter Six concludes the thesis. I draw together the strands of the thesis to make three sets of conclusions. The first set relates to the nature of ethics, and the plurality of ethical positions involved in taking the responsibility for a distant other. The second set examines the implications of ethical consumer practices for the potential of reuniting production with consumption. The final set of conclusions relate to the interrelations between ethics and identity, and the meanings of constancy and fluidity for an ethical consumer self.

Chapter Two - Researching ethics

Introducing the methodological framework

As the aim of the thesis is to examine a broad set of issues surrounding the decisions to consume ethically, the methodology needed to have elements of both extensive and intensive research methods. I therefore opted for three strands of empirical data construction: a questionnaire; in-depth interviews with 15 London based ethical consumers; and a follow-up interview in which I investigated the contents of those fifteen ethical consumers' cupboards. The questionnaire was distributed through magazines with an ethical profile and used to provide a more coherent picture of the "ethical consumer" than those provided by the market research companies. As noted, the interviews took place in two parts: the first in a cafe or bar to talk about the consumer's biography and philosophies; the second in the consumer's home looking at actual products that the had consumer purchased and their reasons for those choices.

The study itself involved consumers who regularly bought products concerned with animal welfare, the environment and fair trade and development issues - probably the three most frequently practised areas of ethical consumerism. Having already acknowledged the difficulties in establishing the exact numbers of ethical consumers, but working on an estimate of 1% of the population, I knew that I could not afford to limit the recruitment by choosing less "popular" ethical areas. However, the aim was to ensure that the definition of "ethical consumer" used meant a consumer who was concerned with more than one of the ethical areas chosen. Hence, a vegetarian who had no other consumer concerns was not really part of the target group. This was to provide a clearer picture of the development and employment of consumer ethics than most existing studies, which have tended to be single issue (Keane and Willetts, 1994; Willetts, 1997; Macnaghten and Urry, 1998) and have encouraged the production of partial understandings of consumer ethics. By comparing and contrasting why and how the individual consumes ethically across different issue areas I hoped to develop a more complex picture of the ethical consumer.

I shall use this chapter to demonstrate the methodologies used. The strength of the empirical data has emboldened me to cast a critical eye over the methods employed in the construction and analysis of the material. I am aware that much of the methodology falls outside contemporary notions about "ethical" research techniques (following Oakley, 1981) as well as the shifting emphasis from objectivity to intersubjectivity (McDowell, 1992: 107, Cook and Crang, 1995: 7). I have strong reasons for my choices of research style and analysis methods, and this chapter will highlight my own methodological debates. It is neither the "chapter about methodology I felt obliged to write" or a justification for my research framework, but a recognition that recruitment strategies, interview strategies and analytical strategies are not separate from the outcomes of the research. I will investigate each of these strategies in turn beginning with the questionnaire, which is part recruitment strategy and part data construction.

Surveying ethical consumers

The questionnaire had two principal functions. The first was to challenge my own fixed ideas about who ethical consumers are, and therefore to provide a broader picture of the ethical consumer en masse than the prevailing images of the young activist instilled in my head by an Environmental Studies degree. Much of the design of the questionnaire was aimed at beginning to breakdown the catch-all of ethical consumerism into recognisable cultural niches. This in turn would provide a basis from which to establish a representative set of interviewees. Following on from this, the second function of the questionnaire was to aid recruitment for the interview series.

Two magazines were chosen to distribute the questionnaire. The *'Ethical Consumer'* is a *Which?* type magazine providing bi-monthly reviews of companies and product areas. It helps keep its readership up-to-date on boycott news and local action. It was the obvious choice to reach a large number of ethical consumers. 2,000 questionnaires were sent out to subscribers, and 405 replies were received. There can be no doubt that its readership, especially those who actually subscribe, are a particularly committed set of ethical consumers. With no reliable data to compare the type of ethical consumer who subscribes to the *'Ethical Consumer'* to those who do not, it is impossible to make claims about the characteristics of either set. However, the well above average reply rate, and the

messages of goodwill written on many of the questionnaires suggest that these consumers are extremely devoted to the cause of ethical consumerism.

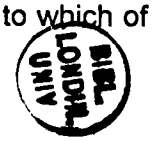
By comparison the 2,000 questionnaires sent out through the *'New Economics Foundation'* magazine achieved only 41 replies. The magazine is more concerned with alternative economic measures than ethical consumerism per se, and its contents are presented in a more professional way than the *Ethical Consumer's* popularist style, therefore the low return rate was a disappointment rather than a surprise. The *New Economics Foundation* respondents appeared to be far more involved in ethical consumerism from a professional level, than from a purely consumer standpoint. However, the low level of questionnaires meant that the two groups of readerships could not be compared significantly. The two sets of questionnaires were, therefore, analysed in the same database, which contained a total of 282 female ethical consumers and 164 male ethical consumers.

The questionnaire had to be designed to catch the reader's eye, not least because numerous other flyers were inserted in every edition of the magazines. As cost prohibited a brightly coloured questionnaire with free gift, the "catch" was in the phrasing of the title. **Are you an ethical consumer?** was emblazoned across the top of the A5 size pamphlet, designed to draw the reader in by "tricking" them into thinking that it would be a self-appraisal questionnaire, and thereby encouraging the initial reading of the pamphlet. A copy of the questionnaire can be found as Appendix A. The questionnaire covered four sides of a folded piece of white A4 paper, and further encouraged the consumer to take the time to complete it by being designed to fold into three, slotting into itself (and therefore requiring no envelope), revealing the return freepost address. A section asked London based ethical consumers if they would be willing to take part in an interview series, and left room for name and contact number, or if the volunteer preferred greater confidentiality, my name and contact number. The biggest flaw with the design of the questionnaire was the small size of the print, especially the tick boxes, which no doubt presented the respondent with difficulties. The boxes had been increased to the maximum size possible after the test sample (50 Environmental Studies lecturers and students) had made comprehensive criticisms about the difficulties involved in filling in the questionnaire. Despite one or two comments written on the

magazine sample which confirmed that the design was still not ideal, the 446 replies generated were adequate for the needs of the thesis.

The questionnaire was designed to be a typical "self-completed questionnaire" (Robson, 1993: 243; de Vaus, 1985). Several market research surveys were examined for style and content, especially concerning socio-economic data. In general there were three types of questions asked. Firstly, those aimed at reinforcing the material I hoped to retrieve from the interviews, to allow for the possibility of empirical generalisations. For example, there were questions about whether friends or family consumed ethically, or whether it was an isolated practice on the part of the ethical consumers. Secondly there were sets of questions which asked about the frequency of purchasing animal welfare, fair trade and environmentally friendly goods, as well as questions about vegetarianism and veganism, which were designed to help provide a starting point for assessing the frequency of certain types of ethical consumerism. Furthermore, I was able to use this type of information to select which volunteers would be interviewed. However, the majority of the questions fell into the third category: those interrogating lifestyle and identity related issues. It was these questions which foregrounded the difficulties attached to both closed and open questions.

In general the respondents showed little willingness to "live" inside the boxes provided for closed question answers. The questionnaires were covered with helpful alternatives, and columns drawn to indicate that the consumer fell somewhere between "sometimes" and "never". At a personal level I sympathised with the respondents, and liked the determination to avoid classification. However, at the level of analysis these additions made life difficult. The questionnaire was originally intended to be analysed using Sphynx, a computer programme capable of dealing with both open ended (ethnographic) and closed (statistical) responses. Due to extreme difficulties encountered by the computer technicians when installing the programme, the questionnaire was finally analysed in the SPSS statistical package, and every answer had to be coded. Rather than having the capacity to write in the names of newspapers, job titles and magazines, I had to code and therefore lost a degree of the diversity of answers - especially where respondents identified themselves as "non-practicing Christian with Buddhist leanings" and I had to make judgment calls as to which of the coded religions they



should be classified under. Multiple answer questions, such as questions about hobbies, which asked the respondent to tick every appropriate answer had to be treated as a series of yes/no answer questions in SPSS, rather than one question with many possible answers, whereas Sphynx is designed to "cluster" multiple answers. This meant that much of the information designed to be cluster grouped to reveal broad brush lifestyle groupings was left without the level of analysis intended - a fact that I am reconciled with now that I have completed the analysis of the interviews and have grown increasingly unsure about any grouping potentials, but which renders the questionnaire a weaker piece of methodology than I had originally intended. This is not to suggest that the questionnaire was without purpose, and as well as providing the background information found in Chapter One, it helped to confirm general trends suggested by the interview materials.

In terms of recruitment, my biggest mistake in creating the questionnaire fell in trying to provide a basis for drawing up socio-economic and cultural identity information so as to be able to draw up a "representative" interview sample. I allowed my desire to achieve a comprehensive academic sample to overweigh my knowledge about ethical consumers and included a question which asked about race. I suspected when I did so that a lot of the respondents would be sceptical of that form of classification. Furthermore, the racial classification attracted a lot of criticism on the questionnaires, with many people refusing to answer the question, and many others writing comments in the vein of "we were all originally black". Such replies made me genuinely embarrassed to think that my notions of "inclusive" research were so out of touch with the infinitely less essentialist thinking of my target group. This embarrassment was made worse by the fact that I had consciously avoided asking a straightforward class question, knowing this too would be resisted.

Despite such insensitivity to the respondents' beliefs, the questionnaire proved invaluable in establishing the sheer range of consumers involved in ethical consumption. The socio-economic characteristics established by the questionnaire grounded the choice of interviewees to be in keeping with a wider sample of ethical consumers. Most impressively the questionnaire managed to ascertain the fact that 17% of the female respondents were over the age of 60, compared to 16% below the age of 30. This not only challenged my own opinions about the demographics

of ethical consumers, but proved a useful recruiting ground for the older interviewees. Perhaps the most helpful finding of the questionnaire, which limited the skewing of my interview sample, was that only 4% of the respondents were vegan - a figure I could not have established by other sources. Moreover, this limited 4% were keen to talk about their consumer practices, and had a far greater rate of volunteering to be interviewed than the vegetarian and meat-eating respondents. Finally, the database revealed a high level of childlessness - 47% for women. This high figure offers validity to the interview sample which similarly attracted relatively few parents - 40% overall.

Questionnaire results

The questionnaire results were placed in three databases, two based on gender which were then merged into an overall database. The reasoning behind this was to allow for all results to be easily analysed on a gender basis, as well as analysis of the entire sample. The results are shown for all three data sets as Appendix B. All results are shown as percentage values rather than number totals to allow easy comparison between the sets. Throughout this section on the questionnaire results I shall refer to the percentage results, alongside bivariate results recorded through cross tabulation. I shall use the questionnaire findings to examine the social constitution of ethical consumers, in particular the roles of race and gender. I will talk more broadly about the socio-economic make-up of the respondents, to suggest that these ethical consumers are not typical of the average British citizen. Finally I shall discuss the relationships between ethical consumerism, political actions and lifestyle groupings. As the questionnaires were circulated in 1997, all comparisons with national statistics are taken from corresponding time periods.

Ethnic make-up

The most startling statistic to be revealed by the questionnaire is the whiteness of ethical consumers. From the total sample 98% were either white British or white other, rising to a staggering 99.6% for the all female sample (see table 27 in Appendix B). I have already suggested that the question asking about ethnic identification had offended some respondents, and it is possible that this may have reduced the level of non-white respondents. However, other factors are likely to position ethical consumerism as a "white" practice. The low levels of ethnic minority involvement in environmentalism is a well recognised phenomenon (Evans, 1999).

In part this is viewed as the effect of the environmental agenda being determined by white middle-class concerns. The Black Environment Network believe the agenda has to shift to one of the inter-relationships between people, rather than the relationship between people and the environment, if there is to be a more inclusive environmental programme (Evans, 1999).

The ethical philosophies which underpin all three consumer issues I am studying are likely to be specific to particular white, Western, middle-class ideals of morality. Huebner and Garrod (1991) argue that Western moral reasoning theories are inadequate in explaining the ethical beliefs of Buddhists, and it is probable that ethical rationalities related to ethical consumerism are similarly inadequate in stimulating involvement from ethnic minorities who have a different philosophical tradition[1] (see Chapter Four for a more detailed discussion of the ethical philosophies surrounding ethical consumerism). Even where ethical reasonings do converge through different philosophical traditions, for example Buddhist beliefs in vegetarianism, it is quite possible that the terminology of "ethical consumerism" is not identifiable with social and religious practices. Therefore the practitioner would not classify themselves as an ethical consumer.

The socio-economic profile of the respondents is also likely to explain the low levels of ethnic minorities involved in ethical consumerism. As McRobbie (1997: 74) suggests, not all members of society have equal access to consumer culture, and ethnic minorities are among those most likely to be lacking the resources to partake in ethical consumerism. Although I specifically avoided asking respondents for their class profile or income levels, several of the questions seek to position the sample in terms of economic resources. Firstly 90% of the sample classified themselves as 'comfortable', 'well-off' or having a 'luxurious lifestyle' (see table 19). Employment rates were 17% above the national average (although results in the 1997 *Abstract of Statistics* relies on 1991 census data for employment figures, and therefore it is probable that national employment levels are under-reported), with the majority of respondents engaged in "professional" jobs (65% see tables 22 and 37). Moreover, there is an 82% home ownership rate, which compares with a

[1] However, the religious make-up of the respondents revealed a far more diverse set of religious philosophies than the racial make-up would suggest. Although the majority of the respondents who expressed identification with a religion were Christian, 11% of the sample were attached to a variety of different religious traditions - including 5.5% of the male sample who were Buddhists.

national average of 68% (see table 36). Indeed, the level of home ownership comes close to the national average for the professional classes only, at 87%[2] (*Annual Abstract of Statistics*, ONS: 1997). Along with the high educational achievement levels, 87% at A level or above and 72% at degree level or above (table 38), this situates the average ethical consumer as solvent, professional, well-educated and undoubtedly middle-class (hence the interest of business in ethical consumers as stated in Chapter One). Such results suggest that the ethics involved in ethical consumerism can be classified as "luxury ethics" - those which an individual can afford to have when the more immediate priorities of day-to-day existence are fulfilled. Given this profile, and the inequalities still prevalent in British society (McRobbie, 1997)[3], it is not surprising that there is a low level of ethnic minority ethical consumers, especially female ethnic minority ethical consumers who are regular readers of consumer magazines.

Gender

The second area which revealed a particular skewing was the high number of female ethical consumers, accounting for 63% of the overall sample. Once again there are several reasons which could account for this uneven distribution. Firstly, it is still women who do the majority of shopping, often facilitating other members of the family's consumption as well as their own (Valentine, 1999; Jackson and Holbrook, 1995; Warde, 1994; Pringle, 1987; Lury, 1996). This is supported by the marital status of the respondents, with the male sample recording a higher level of single respondents than the female sample (27% and 19% respectively, see table 32). This would support the theory that the female of the household would be the more likely to do the shopping, and therefore complete the questionnaire[4].

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[2] It should be noted that the levels of home ownership are probably higher for this sample than ethical consumers as a whole, due to the fact that the questionnaire was sent out through magazines from a subscription list and therefore skewed towards both "settled" individuals, and those with more disposable income than the ethical consumer forced to only make the occasional purchase of a magazine.

[3] McRobbie (1997: 81) suggests that race, gender and class have to be constantly interrogated together to be able to understand the accessibility of consumer cultures to social groups. As the female sample showed a lower level of ethnic minority ethical consumers than the male sample, it appears that McRobbie is right to suggest that these factors are compound in determining the higher levels of resources necessary to engage in ethical consumption.

[4] However, feminist studies of consumption note that although women may be the more likely to shop, men often still maintain control over what is bought (Lury, 1996: 125).

However, much of the skewing of ethical consumerism as a female practice is in all probability attributable to gender socialisation at three levels: the emotionalisation of female consumption practices, the feminine ethic of care, and the gendered pattern of political practices. Shopping, in the form that is being talked about within this thesis, is part of the "job" of housework (Campbell, 1997). Whereas men are socialised into resisting shopping as a feminised practice, women are socialised into shopping as both an aesthetic and caring practice (Dowling, 1993; Campbell, 1997; de Vault, 1991; McRobbie, 1997; Pringle, 1987; Lury, 1996). Perhaps disliking grocery shopping as much as men (Campbell, 1997), women nevertheless undertake shopping with concern for others (usually of their family) uppermost in their minds (Miller, 1998; de Vault, 1991; McRobbie, 1997). Although the level of women classifying themselves as housewives was less than half those registered in national statistics (11% compared to 22% by the *Abstract of Statistics*, 1997), there remained a gender difference ratio of 9:1 female to male homemakers. Given that women are socialised into the practice of consuming through other-related concerns, whereas men regard it as a fulfilling of their own wants, it is hardly surprising that ethical consumerism - by its very nature an other-related practice - should be a gendered activity. That it is gendered, rather than a simple response error, can be supported by table 3 which shows that three times as many female respondents reported having partners who did not consume ethically, than the corresponding male respondents (although for both samples by the far the majority of ethical consumers had ethical consumers as partners).

At the same time, women are socialised into ethics as a system of care, something to be undertaken at a personal level with emotional meaning, whereas traditionally male ethics are viewed as rational, universal systems of thought (Gilligan, 1982; Tronto, 1993; Griffith, 1995; Smith, 1998). As the ethics related to ethical consumerism resonate at a political level, this further compounds the likelihood that ethical consumerism will be a gendered practice. As feminist theories of politics have shown, men and women practice politics in different ways (Peterson and Runyan, 1999; Prokhovnik, 1998; Connell, 1987; Elshtain, 1981; Walby, 1997). Gender socialisation constrains women to the domestic sphere and suggests the traits necessary to take part in political citizenship as distinctly unfeminine, whereas men are at liberty to enter politics at the public and civil level (Peterson and Runyan, 1999; Prokhovnik, 1998). Rather than simply redressing

the imbalance between the private and the public spheres of political life, feminist scholars have been keen to acknowledge that those acts of citizenship which are acted out within the private realm are important political acts. Hence, the personal is political (Prokhovnik, 1998).

That ethical consumerism can be viewed as just such a gendered act of the personal as political is suggested by the percentage difference in practices of political actions. Men consistently reported more political involvement than the women in the sample. Although a surprisingly high minority of the overall sample were members of political parties (24%), suggesting that many men and women practiced ethical consumerism as part of a broader set of political actions, there was a slightly higher rate of male membership (see table 12 in Appendix B). This pattern was repeated across attendance at demonstrations, political rallies and road protests (see table 15). However, for the more direct forms of political action, such as being arrested for political actions or attending protest camps, twice as many men reported participation than women, rising to a difference of 7% women and 16% men involved in direct action campaigns. Further research is needed before any conclusions could be drawn between the higher numbers of female ethical consumers and socialised patterns of political actions. But these findings do at least raise the possibility that ethical consumerism as a feminised practice can, in part, be due to the fact that men may view more public political action as the most appropriate form for environmental, animal welfare and developmental ethics to take. In contrast, therefore, it is possible that those who have chosen to become ethical consumers believe that personal practices are an appropriate level to address political and ethical concerns, or at least that political actions are as important in the private sphere as the public sphere.

Socio-economic characterisics of ethical consumers

As well as being white, largely female and middle-class, the questionnaire revealed a predominance of ethical consumers between the ages of 30 and 50. Once again this may be the effect of the sampling strategy. Compared with a national average of 22% of women and 24% of men under the age of 18 (*Abstract of Statistics*, 1997), the sample had only 2% of women under 18, and no men under 18 at all. This can substantially be accounted for by the fact that this age group are unlikely to be doing their own shopping, justifying my decision to not include the under 18s

in the interviews. For the over 60s, the female sample showed a below national average of the population as ethical consumers, 17% compared to 23%. Men were less well represented in the sample; 9% compared to a national average of 18%. In part this may relate to lower disposable incomes amongst the elderly, but it may also be attributable to the changing attitudes of society over the past two decades (see Chapter Three). To explore in more depth some of these social changes I recruited two of the over 60s respondents to be interviewed.

Given the age profile of the sample, there is a remarkably high incidence of childlessness. Forty seven percent of the female sample and 49% of the male sample were childless. The statistics for the national average become confusing here. According to a recent Family Policy Studies Centre report, this is fairly consistent with the national average by household type where 56% of households are childless (Woodward, 2000). However, due to the age of the sample there is a much lower rate of single ethical consumers than the national average (for females 19% rather than 38% according to the *Abstract of National Statistics*, 1997), suggesting that the childlessness is above average. Indeed, this is supported by *'Social trends'* (ONS, 1997) which shows that on average 20% of 43 year old women are childless, along with 40% of 33 year olds. It is possible that couples without children may be able to devote more time and resources to ethical products. Several of the interviewees (of whom 60% were childless) argued that they did not wish for children on environmental grounds. However, I would be unwilling to advance environmental concern as the determining factor for childlessness without a more detailed survey.

The final point to make about the socio-economic positioning of the ethical consumers is the political allegiance of the respondents. The majority of the respondents classified themselves as either 'left wing' or 'green' in their political allegiance (77% of those who responded to the question, see table 28). Only 1% of the sample admitted to being a Tory supporter, well below the national average even in a year when Conservatives were swept out of power. More over 44% read the *Guardian* or the *Independent* (see table 29) - ten times the national average (*Social Trends*, 1997). It is clear from all the demographics discussed so far, that the ethical consumer is not typical of the average consumer in Britain.

Lifestyle indicators

A set of questions was designed to explore the types of cultural lifestyle(s) demonstrated by ethical consumers, including questions about the ownership of consumer durables, as well details of hobbies and interests. Just as the socio-economic profile differentiated the ethical consumer from the average consumer in Britain, so the purchase of consumer durables revealed that the ethical consumer has slightly different consumer values to the average consumer. Comparing the sample to national statistics provided by *'Cultural Trends'* (Dunlop et al, 1995), *'Social Trends'* (ONS, 1997) and the *'Family Expenditure Survey'* (ONS, 1997), it would appear that the ethical consumer, whilst in general wealthier than the average Briton, owns fewer consumer durables (49% own microwaves compared to a national average of 77%; 81% own television compared to the national average of 99%; and 63% own videos compared to a national average of 84% - see table 20). However, somewhat surprisingly for a group of ethical consumers, there was a higher than average level of dishwasher ownership (23% compared to 20% average). More revealing was the level of ownership of home computers: whilst the national average home computer ownership was 25% in 1997, the well-qualified, financially stable ethical consumer had a home computer ownership rate of 55%.

Although the consumer durables ownership rates were generally consistent between the two gender samples, there was a substantial variation between gender levels of battery charger ownership (63% for men, 51% for women). Sadalla and Krull (1995), in their study of the impacts of green consumerism on identity, argue that providing consumer goods such as environmentally friendly gadgets would help aid green consumerism by reducing the effects of sustainable consumption on the ability to display conspicuous consumption. Hence the success of battery rechargers and water filters (36% ownership). An above average level of car ownership was displayed by the questionnaire sample (76% compared to a national average of 70%). Even being a road protester only slightly reduces the level of car ownership. Out of 39 road protesters in the sample, the majority (20) owned a car, with a further 4 road protesters admitting to either hiring or borrowing a car. This value-action gap (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) reinforces the notion that different types of connections occur between political practice and consumer lifestyles; and between ethical lifestyles and other lifestyles likely to be practiced

simultaneously in an age of plural lifestyles (Featherstone, 1991). I shall explore these two areas in more depth.

Firstly, whereas the car ownership level amongst road protesters suggests that there may be differences between political environmental beliefs and consumer practice, this is not universal throughout political practices and consumer practices. For instance, those consumers who had attended a protest camp over the previous year were exceptionally likely to regularly purchase ethical products, with 15 out of the 20 protest camp attendees regularly buying fair trade products rising to 18 out of 20 regularly buying environmentally friendly products (see cross tabulation tables 1 in Appendix B). There appears to be a relationship between protest actions and committed ethical consumer actions. Those respondents who had been involved in direct action showed similar patterns of consumer commitment, which were higher than for ethical consumers who did not practice direct action (see cross tabulation tables 2 in Appendix B). However, those involved in political rallies and demonstrations tended to show a lesser degree of commitment to ethical consumer practices other than those associated with the environment. Comparisons between protest actions and the purchase of consumer durables show even less of a relationship; attending any form of political demonstration had no impact on the likelihood of the respondent owning a television, video, battery charger or computer. It is, therefore, probable that different forms of political and ethical beliefs have different affects on consumer practices. It is unlikely that a questionnaire can reveal the complex relationships between political or ethical motivations and the ethical consumer.

Secondly, whilst the questionnaire was designed to reveal clusters of lifestyle characteristics, in practice this turned out to be impossible because there simply was not the obvious relationship between particular practices that I had previously assumed. For example, I had anticipated that there would be a set of hobbies that would define an ethical consumer lifestyle as "new age", another that would be an "activists" lifestyle, and maybe an "outdoor" lifestyle. Instead, whilst there were similar numbers of respondents involved in aromatherapy, yoga and meditation cross tabulation revealed that it was not the same set of individuals involved in all the practices. For example, analysis suggests that someone who practices meditation is not much more likely to practice to aromatherapy than someone who

does not (see cross tabulation table 3). Similarly, there was no clear relationship between respondents who practiced conservation, bird-watching, hiking and camping. In fact, except for bird-watchers, who were highly unlikely to indulge in any new-age practices, (partly due to the skewing of the sample towards male birdwatchers and female new age practitioners), there was no observable difference between the likelihood of a respondent practicing two "lifestyle grouped" hobbies than practicing two different lifestyle hobbies.

It is worth noting that the questionnaire sample displayed an extremely above average level of attendance of high cultural functions (see table 15). For example, whereas 22% of the general public visited a museum in 1997 (*Social Trends*, 1997), 60% of the respondents claimed to have paid a visit to the museum over the previous year. Fifty two percent had been to the theatre (compared to a national average of 19%) and 37% had been to a classical music concert (compared to an average 7%). The already high level of educational attainment is supplemented by a well above average level of nightclass attendance (24% compared to a national average of only 2%). Whilst there is a possibility of over-reporting of attendance (41% said that they had attended a religious service over the previous year, even though only 46% claimed to be in any way religious, and half of those admitted to being only slightly religious), the similar percentages displayed by the two separate gender samples suggests that such lifestyle aspirations at least should not be ignored. This once again situates ethical consumerism as a predominantly middle-class concern.

The final point to be made about lifestyle characteristics is that, not withstanding the fact that ethical consumers account for only 1% of the population, the vast majority of the respondents had either friends, family or colleagues who bought ethical products on a regular basis (see tables 4 in Appendix B). Only 16 respondents appeared to be acting in isolation. The non-discursive nature of the questionnaire makes it difficult to judge the significance of the finding. Indeed, it simply raises further questions as to whether ethical consumers influence family and friends to begin to consume ethically or are influenced by friends and family. Neither is it clear whether it is easier to become an ethical consumer if there is some sense of a shared lifestyle or supportive ethical community, or whether the ethical consumer is in reality acting in isolation regardless of the number of other

ethical consumers they know. I shall examine these relationships more fully in Chapter Three using the stories of the interviewees to place the findings in a discursive context.

Ethical consumerism and social movements

The national average for membership of an environmental group is 10% (*Social Trends,* 1997). The questionnaire sample revealed a much higher membership of what could be called associated ethical organisations. Altogether, 91% of the respondents were members of one related organisation (see table 13 in appendix B), with the majority belonging to two or more organisations. Taken on its own this finding may suggest that ethical consumerism in general could be viewed as part of a broader social consumer movement. However, there are several other statistics which point to the fact that ethical consumerism as a social or political movement is a more complex question than simple membership of ethical organisations would imply.

To begin with, specialist magazines were the most frequently used sources of information (see table 10) with 53% of the total sample regularly purchasing a related magazine. This raises the possibility of group membership being symptomatic of a well-educated set of individuals seeking the information necessary to make 'appropriate' ethical choices - both through increased awareness of issues and the corresponding consumer/lifestyle response. Hence, it is likely that a level of group membership can be explained through the quest for information for individual consumer choices, rather than ethical consumerism being part of a set of collective political actions. This would concur with what Gamson (1995: 101) calls "aggregate frames" for action. In contrast to "collective action frames", aggregate frames for social action have a hazy notion of a related social movement ("we") with no clear cut adversary ("them"). Instead of acting as a collective group then, these ethical consumers could simply be using the environmental and social organisations as informers of their own individual actions. Moreover, instead of adhering to the philosophy of particular ethical organisations the respondents tended to indulge in multiple group membership. For example, the majority of those belonging to Greenpeace also belonged to Friends of the Earth (121 respondents belong to both, with an additional 75 belonging to Friends of the Earth alone, and 40 only belonging to Greenpeace) suggesting that the political

philosophy of the organisation is often of less importance than the ethical issue itself. How the ethical consumer relates their actions to the knowledge providers is, therefore, of extreme importance. I shall discuss this at length in Chapter Four.

Secondly, not all the ethical consumers are practising ethical consumerism in the same way, nor did they start to consume ethically from the same point. Whilst an overwhelming majority of respondents claimed to buy environmentally friendly products on a regular basis (82%), only 58% purchased fair trade goods regularly and 57% regularly purchased animal welfare products (see tables 1)[5]. Environmental concern similarly turns out to be the issue which the ethical consumer was most likely to have initially acted on, particularly for men (see table 2), with fairtrade being the least likely to have been the original motivation - perhaps reflecting the more recent introduction of fair trade products. However, there was no definitive pattern to the initiation or practice of ethical consumerism, leaving the possibility that different consumers were purchasing different types of products for different ethical and political reasons, rather than ethical consumerism being a cohesive social movement.

Castells argues:

> "Collective action, politics and discourses grouped under the name of environmentalism are so diverse as to challenge the idea of a movement. And yet, I argue that it is precisely this cacophony of theory and practice that characterizes environmentalism as a new form of decentralized, multiform, network oriented, pervasive social movement." (Castells, 1997: 112).

The questionnaire data reveals that those practicing ethical consumerism also show diverse connections to different forms of political action, consumer action and the philosophies of environmental and ethical groups. Ethical consumerism could, therefore, be viewed as a decentralised, multiform, pervasive social movement. Yet to assume that all observable practices can be classified as a social movement, however aggregate, is to leave the more complex relationships between ethics,

[5] There was quite a large difference between the gender samples in the numbers who purchased ethical products 'regularly' and those who purchased them 'sometimes'. However, there were similar numbers between the samples who 'never' purchased ethical goods. Except for animal welfare, where the men were more likely not to purchase animal welfare products than the women. This in all probability is due to the non-animal tested nature of traditionally "female" products, such as cosmetics. It was telling that none of the female sample queried the meaning of the term 'animal welfare product' whereas several of the male correspondents made it clear that they did not understand the term.

lifestyles, and politics unexamined. The questionnaire has highlighted the fact that not all consumers buy environmentally friendly, fair trade or animal welfare products regularly: it therefore seems likely that the ethical consumer has different ethical relationships to different issues areas. It is possible that the consumer is part of a set of collective actions for the environment, but practices more ad hoc "aggregate" actions for animal welfare. Indeed, the consumer may be involved in a broader set of political actions for environmental issues, but only relate to animal welfare through their consumer purchases. Moreover, it is possible that two individuals with similar consumer practices and political practices could feel different degrees of attachment to a collective group, with one identifying implicitly with a collective "we" and the other acting individually and wanting no deeper identity affiliations to a social movement. In short, I am arguing that the questionnaire is a helpful tool for providing socio-economic data and recognising a variety of consumer and political practices, but that the meaning of those practices and their relationship to social movements are more usefully understood through the use of discursive methodologies such as in-depth interviews.

Recruiting the interviewees

Recruiting ethical consumers who live in London and purchase goods from more than one ethical issue area was always going to be a difficult task, simply because of the small number of consumers involved. Hence I deployed multiple recruitment strategies. As well as the questionnaire, recruitment techniques involved recruiting friends of friends, handing out flyers in the street, and putting flyers in shops. It became obvious that the types of interviewees recruited were not independent from the recruitment techniques employed. I will examine the techniques in turn to show how the employment of several different methods ensured a more diverse set of interviewees.

The first two interviewees were recruited from outside *'Bumblebees'*, a large wholefood shop near Camden. I spent several hours handing out the flyer (Appendix C) to customers coming out of the wholefood shop. The flyers were printed on obviously recycled blue, green and beige paper, and attracted the attention of the consumers. Many of the consumers read the leaflet in front of me, and all took the leaflet home, even though there was a bin outside the shop. At first I expected this to generate a host of phone calls later in the evening, but it became

clear later that the consumers had taken the leaflet home to their recycling bin. The two interviewees I did recruit agreed to be interviewed immediately, something I had been unprepared for, expecting an element of shyness I suppose - I, myself wanted to be anywhere other than there. Both were young women, and I imagine had felt an element of connection to me as a young female trying to portray an image of an ethical consumer. Cherry and Mary (see the thumbnail sketches of the interviewees in Appendix D for further details) were the only two unemployed interviewees, and were the youngest of the sample.

The same flyer that was handed out to Cherry and Mary was placed as an advert in places likely to attract ethical consumers. *'World of Difference'* is a Bloomsbury shop with an environmentally friendly product range; *'Alara'* in Bloomsbury and *'Bumblebees'* in Camden are both wholefood shops; and *'Food for Thought'* in Covent Garden is a wholefood takeaway. I had attempted to negotiate access to Cranks and Neal's Yard cafes, but the level of requests had established strict "no adverts" rules for these companies. I was uncertain about the type of consumer who would respond to an advert requesting interviewees, and although the four recruits were extremely different in all other ways, they were characterised by a certain dedication in their consumer practices. Lizzie was the ethical consumer who spent the most time guaranteeing her purchases were environmentally friendly; Jane and Lisa were both vegan. Ruby was perhaps the most problematic of my interviewees. She suffered from environmental illnesses, and could not come in contact with a whole range of chemicals, ensuring that she had to eat organic food all the time. She had little interest in the other issue areas, and if it wasn't for the perspective that her enforced adherence to green consumerism placed on the inconsistencies of the other interviewees, I doubt I would have kept her in the sample. Importantly, both Lisa and Ruby were originally from abroad, the USA and Canada respectively. Two further interviewees were from abroad, one Canadian and one Australian, representing far more than the 10% "White Other" category recognised by the questionnaire. As all the interviewees now lived in Britain it seems unethical to reject their voices. So, cultural differences noted, all four remained in the sample.

I recruited two friends of friends: Amy through a UCL colleague; Susy through Lizzie. Although I had originally intended to interview only unrelated interviewees, I

agreed to interview Susy when she volunteered, because her emphasis on fair trade products balanced out the vegetarian/vegan and environmental bias which had begun to appear in the sample. Julie and Pam, the two recruits from the *'New Economic Foundation'* questionnaire, proved to both be "experts" in consumer related issues, as could be expected from a professional publication. It was only when I came to the larger volunteer basis of the *'Ethical Consumer'* questionnaire that I actively screened and rejected consumers: two because they were vegan; one because she had ticked the "never" boxes for animal welfare and fair trade. The five interviewees recruited from the *'Ethical Consumer'* were diverse in terms of age (two were in their 60s) and lifestyles, and have no characteristic qualities. It quickly became apparent from the interview material that 15 interviewees produced more than enough information to fulfil the aims of the thesis, and no further attempt was made to recruit.

What was clear from the different types of interviewee recruited was that they had all agreed to be interviewed for a reason. In keeping with Miller and Glassner's findings (1997: 104) it was apparent that the interviewees were primarily concerned with the outcome of the interviews - they anticipated that their involvement with the research would ultimately benefit ethical consumerism. It is difficult not to feel that I have exploited my interviewees when their intentions were so clearly "political" (to the extent that one interviewee actually stated her desires for the future directly into the tape as though it would be listened to by politicians). I had at no time suggested that I had the power to influence business or Government, and had always clearly stated that I was a PhD student, but I was aware throughout the interviews that many of the interviewees were engaging with the advancement of ethical consumerism, rather than my research. Exceptions to this were the "experts" Pam and Julie, with Julie in particular granting me time before she talked to a group of students about permaculture. For these interviewees, the role of expert ensured that they had no illusions about my status. It should be noted that details about the interviewees, especially these experts, have been changed to prevent recognition in a small community. All names in the thesis, therefore, are pseudonyms.

The interview sample had a spread of ages from 20 to 69. Categorising in terms of class proved to be impossible. Outside of one interviewee who recognised herself

as working class, and one as upper class, it was difficult to segregate the range of affluence, jobs, and parental status into categories. Class issues do not, therefore, form a central enquiry of this thesis. Neither, unfortunately, do gender issues. I am at one with McDowell (1999: 229) in believing that we must include men in our research to understand the comparative positions of men and women, and in such a traditionally gendered activity as shopping it should be essential. The original research design anticipated the inclusion of men. However the first interview at a male interviewee's home deteriorated into a highly dangerous situation. The very nature of the research, looking intrusively into the consumer's most personal purchases, places both interviewer and interviewee in a complex relationship of power and discomfiture. Without any guarantees that these power dynamics would not again place me in danger, I decided that I was unwilling to continue with the methodology as it stood. A reassessment of the research left a stark decision to make: redesign the research, and consequently reject five sets of completed interviews; take a research partner into the consumer's home - an intimidating act; or interview only women. The last appeared the less of three evils.

The implications for this thesis of rejecting male interviewees are numerous. The most immediate from my own perspective is that it looks like one further piece of research which believes that only "insider" relationships are productive, and that gender differences place the interviewer as an "outsider". I reject this proposition, and concur with Song and Parker (1995: 246) that many dimensions of sameness and difference are evident in the process of identification, with interviewee and interviewer always having the potential for developing a sense of communality regardless of gender differences. Not interviewing male ethical consumers meant that I lost the opportunity to interrogate many of the complex interactions between gender and consumption, gender and ethics, and gender and politics - which as these form consumption and ethics form the theoretical basis for the thesis warrant further discussion about the empirical and theoretical implications.

As the data from the questionnaire sample suggested that there were likely to be several differences between male and female practices of ethical consumerism. Most obviously, the loss of male interviews meant that the reasons for the imbalance between levels of male and female questionnaire respondents could not be examined to assess whether the difference in numbers was caused by women

doing the majority of the shopping, women caring more about the issues, or women being more likely to view personal practices as an appropriate opportunity to further political ends. Moreover, it is difficult to tell whether men and women would have the same attitudes to ethical consumerism as a practice. Given that Campbell (1997) believes that women find shopping more pleasurable than men do, and that men see shopping as a threat to their masculinity, it is quite possible that ethical consumerism could be viewed as a positive, enjoyable and empowering practice by women, but as an embarrassing, frustrating and time consuming practice by men. Gender studies of consumption reveal that men shopped differently to women, seeing themselves as less skilled (Lupton, 1996; Jackson and Holbrook, 1995) and less interested in browsing to accumulate product information; visiting fewer shops; and seeking to spend the least possible amount of time to fulfil their consumer needs (Campbell, 1997; Jackson and Holbrook, 1995). Ethical consumerism, as a practice which requires time and effort to both collect product and issues information, and to visit specialist shops, would therefore by likely to be practiced differently by males and females.

Ethical consumerism as an ethical practice that has meaning for the self, in terms of how the consumer feels about what it is good to be (Taylor, 1989) and how others view the consumer (particularly in different spaces, e.g. work), is probably highly mediated by gender. I have already suggested that feminist theorists highlight the gendered differences in ethical constructions (Tronto, 1993, Gilligan 1982) and political practices (Frazer, 1998, Elsthain, 1981), and the lack of a male sample makes it impossible to know whether the construction of an ethical self is gender specific. Where specific practices of ethical consumerism are viewed as particularly feminine, for example vegetarianism (Fiddes, 1991, Keane and Willetts, 1994) there is no ability to investigate the differences between the impacts on the identities of men and women. Given that in the questionnaire sample more men than women were vegetarian, the loss of a male sample makes it difficult to determine how constrained different genders feel by negative external perceptions - and if these identity constraints do, therefore, create gender specific patterns of the types of ethical products the consumer is willing to buy. McRobbie (1997) and Leslie and Reimer (1999) suggest that the gendered effects of consumption vary by product range, and it is likely that gender differences are at a premium for the three areas I am studying - food, household cleaning products and personal

hygiene products (see for example Radner, 1986; Warde and Hetherington, 1994; Murcott, 1995; Craik, 1994). Not having a male sample mean that the findings of thesis relate specifically to women as ethical consumers. A parallel study of a diverse range of male ethical consumers remains an important, comparative undertaking.

I, therefore, accept that a study of ethical consumers that contains only white, female voices presents a limited picture of the development and practice of ethical consumerism. I am aware that debates about the construction of consumer ethics, and the ethical relationship to a distant other are especially rendered a partial reading. For much of the writing I was hampered by qualms about debating the role of emotions in a specifically female sample. I am aware that I cannot claim to have conducted a comprehensive analysis of ethical consumers. However, neither was the sample reducible to a group of interviewees stemming from common social and cultural positions. The diversity of ages and backgrounds do express the voices of a diversity of female ethical consumers, with a plurality of consuming practices.

First interview: The ethics of interviewing about ethics

Much of the qualitative work involved with green consumerism has used in-depth groups to examine environmental responsibility (Harrison, Burgess and Filius, 1996, Macnaghten and Urry, 1998). I rejected the use of groups for three main reasons. Firstly, I was interested in the biographies of ethical consumers, the specifics of the influences on each consumer that encouraged her to begin the process of ethical consumption. These individual stories would be lost in an open debate where the very nature of conversation denies the time for in-depth accounts of group members' histories. Secondly, I was interested in the consumers' very individual patterns of behaviour involving ethical consumption and the barriers to it, and whilst I believe that an in-depth group would be useful in opening up this debate, it would also necessitate a disaggregation of the group thinking into individual voices to understand patterns of behaviour. This suggests that it would be easier to recognise each consumer's behaviour if they were interviewed separately in the first place. Finally, much of my interest in ethical consumption was concerned with how the consumers developed their ethical beliefs, and to begin to understand their construction of personal moral obligations. Whether we accept Habermas's belief in discursive ethics which develop communally (Habermas,

1990) or Billig's critique of Habermas which argues that we are naturally in a state of argumentation, rather than agreement (Billig, 1989), it becomes obvious that a group discussion of personal ethical beliefs has implications involving how we negotiate ethics in discourse. I appreciate this is a complex debate which cuts across the thinking about the very nature of ethics. For example, this would be an irrelevant methodological point if we assume that we have no ethical framework and only have ethics in discourse[6]. However, given the nature of the subject matter, and the dominant discourses through which it is framed, my methodological thinking starts from a clear position, that we have some consistency of ethics, and furthermore that we would feel obliged to negotiate/defend our ethics, or seek to influence the ethics of others in a group discourse situation.

I opted for in-depth interviews with consumers as a more appropriate methodology (see MacCracken, 1988; Burgess, 1992; McDowell, 1992; Herod, 1993 and Schoenberger, 1991). However, the assumption that we are not indifferent to, or unaffected by, the ethical beliefs of others has major implications for the interviewing technique employed. Having accepted that group dynamics would impact upon the individual's narrative of ethics, it becomes necessary to accept that any interviewer revealing her ethics to the interviewee would have similar effects - to produce either agreement or argument. I have been ridiculed too many times for being vegetarian, and told too many times by meat eating friends that they "don't eat much meat", to expect that my position would not influence the interviewee in unpredictable ways. As feminist thinking about interviewing techniques has come to promote conversation and intersubjective relationships as a more ethical and less exploitative method of research (Cook and Crang, 1995, Song and Parker,1995, McDowell, 1994 and 1999), there are obvious problems involved in the ethics of interviewing about ethics.

To illustrate the role of revealing your positionality about consumer ethics, and perhaps to suggest that there can be no such thing as an interview which is not contaminated by the discursive practices of the interviewer (Oakley, 1981), I want to describe two situations concerning my positionality in the interviews, both taken

[6] In their paper addressing the use of focus groups in the study of shopping, Holbrook and Jackson (1996: 141) acknowledge that the discussion of deeply held views is particularly difficult in a group context. Whilst they suggest the use of groups of comparative strangers, I feel that for the study of the construction of ethics, the group scenario would still affect the expression of the ethics.

from the first few interviews conducted. Mary was younger than me, and I think it would be fair to say that it would have been difficult to decide which of us was the most nervous going into the interview. Having made the theoretical decision not to reveal my own ethical position, I explained the aims of the research in terms of understanding why and how people consume ethically. It was evident that Mary had agreed to be interviewed assuming that I was sympathetic to the cause of ethical consumerism, but as the interview continued along a question and answer line she began to doubt my positioning. At the end of the interview, as soon as I turned off the tape, Mary asked me whether or not I believed in ethical consumerism. My own silence throughout the interview had begun to concern Mary: I suspected that she was worried that I was in fact interested in damaging the cause of ethical consumerism. I became aware of the impact that my lack of interaction had had on Mary, and determined to not be so unnerving to the next interviewee.

It didn't take long to allow my openness to shift the interview with Jane in an unpredictable manner (Song and Parker, 1995: 252), neither was my exposition of positionality intentional. I had met Jane in a cafe, and before I had even had time to reassure her about my aims I had made the mistake of ordering a cappuccino. Unfortunately, Jane turned out to be vegan and my ordering a milk product led to the entire discussion about ethical consumerism revolving around milk - to the extent that Jane stated that she felt it was not possible to be an ethical consumer if you were not vegan. In subsequent interviews I reached a compromise position. I made clear that my sympathies were with ethical consumerism, but I avoided any comment or behaviour which would inform my interviewees of my personal consumer practices. I was never asked about my consumer ethics, but I would have answered any direct questions put to me. I used a question and answer style, but interpolated the odd comments or stories which suggested my agreement and understanding. Rather than an exploitation, I tried to make this one-sided delivery closer to a conversation where it is evident that one party has something of interest to say and the other is content to listen. I had several themes of interest, but let the conversation progress naturally, following through histories, biographies and ideas. Whilst several of the interviewees did comment that it was unusual to have the space to talk about yourself, they all agreed that it had been a pleasant experience. In this I concur with Jones (1991: 211) that my interviewees had

appeared to find the process therapeutic (although I have more to say about this in the altogether different process of the second, and more intrusive, interview). Inevitably, my research reached neither the dream of the positivist's "pure" interview, free from contamination by the interviewee (Silverman, 1993: 99), nor a feminist "Utopia" of empowering and equitable dialogue (McDowell, 1992, 107). My interview technique did not anticipate objectivity, but neither was it fully interactive, instead I acknowledged the unusual difficulties attached to researching consumer ethics.

The first interview was put in place to look at histories and philosophies more than practices. As well as establishing which ethics the consumer practices and the philosophies informing those ethics, I was interested in developing a context for the ethical consumer - family, friends, hobbies, and ambitions. I had originally intended the first interviews to be conducted outside the home, in a cafe or bar chosen by the interviewee. This was to allow myself and the consumer to build up a rapport before I entered their home. In practice this turned out to be harder to achieve than I had imagined for several of the consumers. Amy had M.E. and rarely left her home; Jo was in her late 60s and felt more comfortable at home than in a cafe; and Cath had children, it was the summer holidays, and it was impossible to envisage a meeting place outside of her home which would allow an uninterrupted interview. To have pushed for a consistent interview series in terms of the context would have meant losing the very voices which had been the least represented by the sample. As the first interview was intended to listen to the interviewees' biographies, beliefs and interests, as well as the roots of their ethical consumer practices and the impacts their practices have on themselves and close others, it is difficult to assess the effects of context, if any, on these narratives. Perhaps more damaging to the comparative nature of the interviews were the interventions of third parties. Although the majority of interventions occurred in the second interview at home, where several of the interviewees had family members present in the house, intermittently entering rooms and contradicting interviewee assertions, Amy had a family member with her at all times. Her personal biography was open to objection by some-one her knew her well, and this undoubtedly had an influence on what was told.

A further factor was involved in the production of narratives by my interviewees. In the earlier interviews the consumers had been thrown by the questions about when they first started to have an interest in the issues I was investigating and their own biographies. The interviewees appeared not to have anticipated such a personal account of ethical consumerism. I, therefore, sent the rest of the interviewees a schedule which said that I would be talking about the consumer's biography and ethical consumer history (Appendix E). Allowing the consumer the time to construct a coherent narrative in advance was the pay-off for having access to the individual's biography. There was nothing to suggest that any of the remaining interviewees had in fact structured an answer about their histories, but the discomfort of being taken by surprise by the depth of the questioning had subsided, and I therefore believe that it was the correct decision to take. At all times, as Miller and Glassner suggest (1997: 100), we are listening to partial narratives of the interviewee's complexity, and this partial story-telling was regularly made obvious by the interjections of family, and by the interviewees' own "off-record" remarks. For example, on one occasion an interviewee told me an extremely personal story which made sense of much of her thinking, but then asked me not to ever use the story. In turn, family interviews would probably reveal a more realistic picture of consumer practices and consumer biographies, but at some cost to the consumer's desire to control her own narrative. Throughout the empirical chapters, I insert demonstrations about the impact of third party interventions, mainly through Rachel and her husband Peter who happily and amusingly entertained me with a display of the contradictions between narrative and practice. These three way conversations seek to demonstrate the difficulties inherent in researching "real life", and act as an emphasis of the impossibility of "mirroring reality". However, I am not interested in postulating that it is impossible to uncover any truths through empirical research, and I believe the narratives of the consumers have much to say about ethical consumerism.

Second interview: The world in a cupboard

The second interview was far more concerned with the everyday practices of ethical consumers; how these are related to consumer beliefs and mediated by the complexities of everyday life. This interview saw the departure from well-worn methodologies into uncharted terrain. Whereas there are several studies of shopping practices where the interviewer has gone shopping with the interviewee

(see for example Miller, 1998; Miller, Jackson, Thrift, Holbrook and Rowlands, 1998), I have no knowledge of any precedent for looking through consumers' cupboards outside of market research. The reason for this untested methodology was that for years I have been told by friends and family that they hated shopping with me; my knowledge of products and companies made them feel guilty and encouraged them not to purchase their usual commodities. Not wishing to subject the interviewees to this unpleasant experience, and reasonably sure that my impending visit wouldn't drive the consumer to purchase a complete new set of cleaning products, I decided that a trawl through cupboards was a better option.

The interviewees were informed at the point of recruitment that I was interested in looking through their cupboards at home to see what they purchased and why. Nobody backed out of the interview process having been told what it entailed, and nobody complained later about the technique, although it was not without its quandaries (more about this later). Three product areas in particular were chosen for the study: food; personal hygiene/bathroom products; and general household cleaning products. Appendix F carries a list of product specific debates to aid the reading of the empirical chapters. The areas were selected primarily because of the availability of ethical product ranges in these areas, although the different areas did not offer equal opportunities for all issue areas. This meant that the study had a broad focus on how the consumer negotiated three consumer ethics over three product areas, hopefully eliminating the bias of single product or issue studies. The choice of three product areas had certain implications, both empirically and theoretically. The interviewees had far more to say about food than the other two product areas, partly because it involves more products, and partly because food is a current "hot" topic. This bias towards food is repeated in academic literature (see amongst others Bell and Valentine, 1997; Murcott, 1983; Tansey and Worsley, 1995; Warde: 1997, and Caplan, 1997) with an extreme paucity of writing about cleaning products, and more surprisingly, personal hygiene/bathroom products (although see Craik, 1994, and Vinikas, 1992). The bias is reflected throughout the empirical chapters, but it is evident that extending the focus of the research to three product areas facilitates interesting comparisons, which a focus on food would have precluded. For example, a comparison of the consistency of ethical behaviour over the product areas.

The aims of the second interview were to understand the everyday negotiations involved in ethical consumerism. Having already questioned the consumer about their beliefs and consumer philosophies in the first interview, I had established a broad picture of the interviewee's intended consumer practices - vegetarianism, a commitment to fair trade, etc. This left the second interview free to examine these practices in context, to begin to demystify the "inconsistencies" the market researchers and psychologists are so keen to portray (King, 1995; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Sutton, 1998). I was interested in asking about the types of products bought, the information sources used and how the consumer determines the best "ethical" choice, especially when there are three possible issue areas to be addressed for any one product. I wanted to explore the links between the ethical consumer and a wider ethical community, and the links between the ethical consumer and conventional consumption practices.

In the first two interviews I had asked the consumer to choose three products from each product area, and explain why they had chosen these products. The technique proved to be problematic as the products lost their contextuality. Moreover, such a direct form of questioning provoked the consumer to rationalise behaviours which are guided by "vague and unexamined practical consciousness" (Sayer, 1984: 15). It became apparent that the consumer was struggling to construct an easily comprehensible ethical relationship, which was not only uncomfortable for the interviewee, but would ultimately invalidate the findings about ethical responsibility. For the rest of the interviews I took a more broad brush approach to examining the consumer's purchases. A general trawl through the fridge, food cupboards, the cleaning cupboard and the bathroom allowed the consumer to talk naturally about her likes and dislikes, patterns of shopping, guilty purchases, and difficulties in choosing between "ethical" products and other attractions. In particular, it highlighted the role of flatmates and family members in the consumer's shopping practices: goods were pointed out as "their" purchases and critiqued, opening up the "in the worldness" of the ethical consumer. The role of habituation and embodied ethics began to become obvious, as the difference between the narratives of new and long-term ethical consumers were allowed the space to occur. The "general trawl" turned out to be a far more successful technique, providing a wealth of unlooked for information and a more textured picture of the ethical relationship.

Cupboard trawling was, therefore, a fabulous methodological practice as far as research findings were concerned, but it had strong ethical implications. It is clearly a very intrusive technique, and it was far more dependent on positionality and insider relationships than the one-to-one interview. I was much happier to ask the younger members of the sample to show me their cupboards than the older generations. Those closer to my age seemed to enjoy the novelty of the experience, chatting happily about their purchases and offering me drinks and food as we went along. The "experts" similarly found the technique unthreatening, and the emphasis fell on the instructive nature of their consumer practices. However, when it came to interviewing Jo, the oldest interviewee, I couldn't bring myself to ask to look in her cupboards. Instead I initiated the conversation about purchases, which naturally led to her opening her cupboards to remind herself what was in them. It was sheer luck that we were sat round the kitchen table, otherwise the cupboard trawl would not have occurred. For several of the consumers the bathroom trawl did not occur. We started with food and then moved on to bathroom products, and I left it up to the consumer to decide whether they led me to the bathroom or talked about their purchases from a distance. This may have affected the findings, and helped aid the bias towards food, but I judged (correctly I believe) that this look at very personal products, in very private spaces, had to be a voluntary action. Should I have chosen a different product area? It is a difficult question to answer, because it was the right product area theoretically, but probably not for this research technique.

The technique itself had further ethical failings. There may be a strong academic and marketing recognition of the difference between beliefs and actions, but the ethical consumers were taken by surprise by their own inconsistencies. On arrival at the second interview, several of the consumers commented that they had realised that they weren't really as ethical as they had said, and part way through the cupboard trawl with Rachel she unhappily admitted that she wasn't a very good ethical consumer - something that had only at that moment become a conscious knowledge. Our images of ourselves and our practices do not always tally with practised reality, and whilst I had sought to reassure consumers that this was not a judgmental exercise, becoming suddenly aware of yourself necessitates an exercise in self-judgement. I had no intention of influencing the ethical consumers,

but many of the interviewees said that the process had made them determined to do more. As McCracken points out (1988: 27) participation in qualitative methodologies can be emotionally demanding in ways that quantitative methodologies rarely are.

Transcribing, coding and mapping

I have strong opinions about the importance of data analysis, and took the processes of transcribing, coding and mapping as seriously as I took the interview process. Each interview was transcribed by me. I produced a faithful representation of the conversation, including every pause, laugh, interjected "yeah" and interviewee "um". As I transcribed each interview as soon as possible after it had been carried out, the transcription of the interviews began to have an effect on the interview series. I ceased to interject verbally as I could hear myself saying "yeah" and "right" in an unnatural way. Those interventions which had been recognisable on tape became a physical gesture - a smile or a nod, and were lost from the transcription process. I had noted any obvious frustrations or embarrassments on the behalf of the interviewee as soon as I left the interview, and these were added to the transcripts to help aid analysis.

> "Many people using unstructured interviewing shun all quantification. They argue that their objective is to understand the meaning of what is said and this is not achieved by statistical tests. Rather, it is done through immersing yourself in the data until you think like your respondent, you see the world as they do and, finally, you understand them" (Breakwell, 1990: 78).

McDowell and Sharp (1997: 99) point out that feminist methodology is in part a reaction against the appropriation of subject voices in order to produce a coherent theoretical argument, and I suggest that analysis techniques are no less central to this appropriation than the interview style and questions asked. I employed a somewhat stringent analysis technique which aimed to look at the stories of the ethical consumers, but without claiming to encapsulate their subjectivity. I began this thesis by writing through my positionality, admitting my subjective view of ethical consumerism. To have had no formal method of analysis, to have simply read and re-read transcripts, would have suggested one of two things. Firstly that having reflexively examined my subjectivity I am now capable of eschewing it, of thinking like my interviewee - surely a superhuman feat? Or secondly, that having declared my subjectivity any attempt at increasing an objective reading of the

consumers' texts would be an act of superfluity, and I am henceforth free to appropriate my interviewees voices for my own ends. Instead I opted for a system of coding and mapping, which ensured that all quotes in my empirical chapters had been subject to a process of contextualization intended to offer a greater degree of objectivity.

I developed my coding system initially through a line by line analysis of two different interviewee transcripts (as recommended by Strauss, 1987: 28). Four main themes were coded with different coloured pens: consumer biography; knowledge; ethical philosophies; and consumer practices. These themes were then broken down into further categories after a second reading - 28 codes in total. The codes covered obvious phenomena such as personal biography and ethical consumer biography, and less obvious ones which were revealed through the process, for example stories of ease and difficulty, comments made about other consumers' ethics, and unsolicited explanations of the consumers' tastes. The coded materials were then mapped onto A1 card whilst listening to the interview to aid the comprehension of meaning. Every line was mapped under the appropriately coded heading, with the interview number and transcript line number noted by the side for ease of reference. Many sentences fell into multiple headings and I drew arrows between the headings to highlight the links, the most obvious being the relationship between the consumer's knowledge about environmental issues and their ethical philosophies. These multiple headings proved to extremely helpful in aiding an understanding of complexity. Many other comments seemed to defy classification, and it was often these which produced the greatest insights into ethical consumerism.

I chose not to use a computer package to analyse transcripts after attending a day's workshop on Ethnograph (at Surrey University, 1997). Rather than simply coding and then printing out the lines under each heading, I wanted to use the transfer to a mind-map to analyse the interviews further. I colour coded prompted answers, and answers to questions I hadn't asked - the tensions of a family Christmas meal becoming a recurrent theme across the interviewees. I placed positive and negative signs next to comments about society, ethical consumerism and ethical practices, to easily recognise the interviewees desires and discontents. I noted whether the consumer had stated whether their consumer practices were in

the nature of "I'd rather not", "I definitely wouldn't" and "I would if" to begin to recognise that not all practices had equal status, and then I would note the consistencies from one interview to the next. Although I often paraphrased on the map, I also highlighted the use of interesting language, especially in relation to ethics where I was often struck by the individual's sincerity and emotive language. At times particular quotes encapsulated the relationship between themes, or had strong resonance with theoretical concerns. I was keen not to lose these striking quotes, and noted them under a separate heading, eventually cutting and pasting every "important" quote from all of the interviewees into one computer file. These quotes were then sorted into broad categories and consulted alongside the maps when writing up. Every interviewee's map took two days to produce, and after it was completed I turned the map over and noted what had struck me most about the interviewees, to ensure that I didn't lose a feel for the person as a whole in the particularities.

This method of analysis brings with it a whole host of implications. Most obviously, as Miller and Glassner (1997: 100) point out, every attempt at coding and categorisation of stories results in a loss of the wholeness of the representation. I have tried to minimise this loss by employing coding along with other techniques, but inevitably every time we quote empirical data it is a step away from the wholeness of the meaning because it is not our story to truncate. At the same time a good system of coding and mapping should seek to facilitate a deeper understanding of the interviewee's thinking, as every comment is thought about, noted and categorised, rather than those which easily capture the imagination/theorisation. In this it is a process which deepens the awareness of the consumer's ethics and practices, without claiming to possess their subjectivity.

When conducting the interviews, many of the comments started to sound familiar and I inevitably developed my own beliefs about the realities of ethical consumerism. An example is that I was certain that no interviewee ever said anything negative about ethical consumerism, and I believed I had a categorical research finding. However, as Mann (1986) says, situations are always messier than our readings of them, and the coding revealed that one interviewee had consistently moaned about ethical consumerism. For me, this mapping of complexity has been the best and the worst of coding. It defies generalities, shifting

theories towards multi-faceted processes which are individually negotiated. It facilitates an understanding which is altogether deeper, and yet less categorical, than that which I held before I began the analysis. At the same time it aids easy comprehension of information which is spread throughout interviews: I found that I was incapable of chronologically ordering events in the consumer's life without a complete mapping of the transcripts. In terms of bringing together material from all the interviewees about certain aspects of ethical consumerism it was a quick and comprehensive method: it was possible to locate every conversation dealing with an issue instantly. The only downside to this was that with a variety of quotes about a subject, I rarely returned to the tapes to listen to the quotes, unless I was unsure about the meaning of a particular comment. Hence, a further step away from the original telling of the story.

It will become obvious when reading the empirical chapters that the analysis technique has had an impact on my writing style. I rarely employ long, single quotes from interviewees. Instead I present two or three quotes to demonstrate similarities or differences. The interesting quotes that I gleaned from the transcripts were still used alongside the coded material, but my subjective interest in the quotes was limited by the quote being placed in context with the interviewees' own beliefs and practices, and the beliefs and practices of other interviewees. This inevitably produces a better understanding of whether or not the interesting quote was specific to the individual, and consistent with her actions. Not that this either influences the use of the quote or invalidates it, it simply contextualises it. The coding and categorisation meant that I began to structure my reading of the processes of ethical consumerism in a particular way. I developed an awareness of how the narratives of the ethical consumers could be divided into empirical chapters which offered the most comprehensive debate about the reasons for becoming an ethical consumer, the structure of ethics, and the barriers to consistent behaviour.

The three empirical chapters represent distinctive, but interrelated sets of stories that the interviewees told about their lives as ethical consumers. *Chapter Three* examines the stories told about becoming an ethical consumer. I position the decisions to purchase ethical products within time frames, cultural contexts and familial and social networks. Rather than beginning with the assumption that ethical

consumerism is a lifestyle choice, I demonstrate what becoming an ethical consumer means to the self. *Chapter Four* concentrates on stories about how the self relates to an ethical "other" and how this relationship is transformed into ethical practices. Sources of information and issues of trust are examined to establish how the ethical consumer determines an ethical purchase. *Chapter Five* looks at the stories told about actual purchases. It unites ethical concerns with considerations of health, pleasure, place and price to show the negotiations which compromise the everyday world of the ethical consumer.

Inevitably, I could have chosen to construct these chapters along a variety of lines. The separation into distinct kinds of stories was chosen because it allowed deeper analysis of complex relationships than would have been possible through any other themes. Following through themes such as identity, knowledge and ethics would have been repetitive and difficult to comprehend without the separation between narratives of ethical philosophies and narratives of consumer practices. The chosen structure may suggest different temporal elements in the practice of ethical consumerism: becoming an ethical consumer, then developing an ethical relationship, and finally negotiating everyday barriers in the practice of ethical consumerism. Whilst recognising how such distinctions shaped the consumers' narratives, my aim is not to endorse such separations. Instead, each of these chapters is meant to provide a different lens through which to picture the ethical self, identifying elements that are interrelated, not distinct. For example, the ethical relationships examined in Chapter Four are central to the concerns of Chapter Three: the decision to become an ethical consumer is not taken in isolation from an ethical position. Neither should the construction of an ethical position be seen as happening in isolation from the everyday context of consumer choices which informs Chapter Five. The two are examined separately here to understand more fully the difference between ethics and actions so beloved of the social psychologists. The three chapters should, therefore, be read as different narratives which together are used to constitute an ethical self.

Conclusions

I have used this chapter to explain and critique my research methodology. I appreciate that every methodology has its own set of ethical concerns and practical limitations; that all empirical evidence is partial, subjective and contestable.

However, my methodological framework has much to recommend it. The use of a plurality of recruitment strategies attracted a more differentiated sample of ethical consumers than I could have achieved through any one questionnaire, or by leafleting wholefood shops. The interviewees, whilst not a fully representative sample, revealed the diversity of ethical consumerism not just demographically, but through their philosophies and practices. The two-step interview process allowed for a deeper understanding of the differences between ethics and action than would have been possible from ordinary in-depth methods. The cupboard trawl in particular portrayed a picture of the everyday difficulties inherent in ethical consumerism, although it has to be admitted that this process was not without impact on the ethical consumer. Finally, the method of analysis ensured that my subjectivity was minimised in the reading of ethical consumerism, and structured the empirical chapters into three sets of interrelated stories.

Chapter Three - Becoming an ethical consumer

Introduction

I shall use this chapter to examine the stories told by the interviewees about the process of becoming an ethical consumer. Four main themes are developed throughout the chapter. Firstly, I shall begin by arguing that rather than simply taking ethical concerns as an additional set of variables for determining consumer decisions, for the interviewees an ethical consumer was something to become. This becoming has meaning for the ethical consumer's sense of self, and is rarely achieved without wider identity implications. I shall therefore, use this chapter to demonstrate the difficulties attached to become an ethical consumer, and the positive gains to the self. Secondly, I shall argue that whilst ethical consumerism can be understood in part as a reflexive project of identity construction, it can not be reduced to a process of consuming in which other-centred ethics simply mask a concern with the self. Instead, the transcripts of the interviewees reveal a problematisation of self and other directed concerns. The third theme of this chapter is the relationship between ethical consumerism and social and cultural contexts. I shall suggest that rather than consumer ethics being ingrained in the interviewee through their social and cultural backgrounds, mediated knowledges and social networks provide the individual with shared values which offer the freedom to become an ethical consumer. Finally, it will become clear throughout the chapter that there are diversity of motivations which have influenced the ethical consumer. The interviewees' paths into and through ethical consumerism are highly individual, and I shall suggest that no one theoretical position is sufficient for explaining the motivations of the ethical consumer. I shall, therefore, offer no definition of ethical consumerism as lifestyle choice, or singular identity position that can be adopted or rejected. Instead, all three empirical chapters will be used to construct ethical consumerism as a process with a plurality of meanings.

"Becoming" an ethical consumer

> "The utility of beliefs regarding the motivational role played by three classes of outcomes in predicting environmentally concerned behaviour was examined with survey data collected from two samples - undergraduate students and community residents. ... Multiple regression analyses indicated that desires regarding principled and

social outcomes explained a significant amount of variance in behavioural reports for the student sample, whereas desires related to tangible outcomes did so with the community sample. In support of a multivariate approach to the study of environmentally-concerned behaviour, threat perception, issue importance, and efficacy constructs also accounted for a significant proportion of variance in behavioural reports" (Axelrod and Lehman, 1993: 149).

JO: "... one became more sensitive to the environment later, after family had grown up and left, I became aware of what Friends of the Earth were doing and I think really the first impact came from reading, um, that book *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson. Um, that was quite stunning, it made one a bit frightened, and then after that I think the next thing that got me on track was um, reading and this was something, a book that my son brought home, um, Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* and ever since then it has been a positive effort to, you know, think twice about what you get and what you buy"

CATH: "I started when I was about 17. It was when Greenpeace first started, I have been a member since then, so er, 20 years, and I think, I don't know whether Greenpeace or Friends of the Earth came first, they are roughly the same time and I became a member straightaway. I was just amazed that they could go out and do it, I am not the sort of person to go out and do that sort of thing. I felt I just wanted to support them, and it is from their literature and the things that they send you that um, I got more interested: I am a terrible one for merchandise".

CHERRY: "My parents were both staunch socialist Marxists so I was always very, conflict was always a massive part of my life. My mum used to be a local councillor. My dad was always shop stewarding and involved in trade unions and going to meetings so .. it's funny actually cos my dad was always very involved in the work side of things, my mum has always been very involved in the health side of things, and I just got into the environmental side of things. I think it was probably down to, down to, the fact that I wanted to get involved in something quite revolutionary and the timing just happened to be that, you know, a lot of people were interested at college and that was what struck me as being urgent".

When I questioned my interviewees about their stories of starting to consume ethically, so sure was I that they would have stories to tell, it never occurred to me that this was significant until long after I had analysed the interview scripts. I confess that the interview schedule I had sent to ethical consumers fore-warned the interviewees of my intention to ask about their reasons for beginning to purchase ethical products. But although these narratives may be mediated through reflexivity, the simple fact remains that the interviewees have clear ideas as to why they are ethical consumers. These consumers then show none of the unconscious dispositions of Bourdieu's Habitus (1984). Whereas Bourdieu saw taste as

comprised of socialised and class specific moralities as well as aesthetics (Bourdieu, 1984 and Gronow, 1997: 17), in this study the consumers' moralities that dictate another form of taste are based upon more transparent inspirations[1].

The ability to describe an original motivation for becoming an ethical consumer suggests that the stories that the consumers tell are important to them. Rather than the cold calculations of behavioural outcomes and issue importance demonstrated by Axelrod and Lehman (1993), the stories told by the ethical consumers are full of personal sentiment and complex notions of what it is good to be: they give the impression that the individuality of the narratives will consistently defy any classification determined by multiple regression analysis. If Campbell is correct in his belief that there are relatively few biographically significant life choices in a consumer's life (Campbell, 1996: 163), then it can be assumed from the clarity of the interviewees' narratives that the decision to introduce certain ethics to their consumption practices comprise just such a significant life choice. Considering the recruitment methods I used to attract interviewees, the fact that becoming an ethical consumer is important to the consumer is hardly a surprise: anybody willing to give up their time voluntarily to talk about ethical consumerism undoubtedly regards it as a priority in their lives[2]. In fact, I suggest that rather than simply introducing a further element into consumer decision making processes, these narratives imply that such moments reflect a history of "becoming" an ethical consumer. This assumption is reinforced by the consumers' explanations of the changes to the self and the difficulties involved in becoming an ethical consumer. I shall start by talking through the difficulties the interviewees faced:

> JULIE: But ethical consuming came on relatively gradually, um, it's not something that you can suddenly decide you are going to get into, it is a matter of what choices are available ... The biggest thing is the convenience factor. It is far more difficult to put yourself out than it is to talk about what is available.
>
> LISA: Well, I liked the arguments behind being vegan, I just thought I was too weak to be vegan, I didn't think I could pull it off. I thought it would be too hard. I had to do that gradually. Um, I said right the only way I'm going to pull off this vegetarian thing is if I still allow myself to eat chicken when I go to Chinese restaurants. So once or twice in the

[1]This is not to say that the underlying value systems of the consumer do not play a role in determining the likelihood of the individual deciding to be an ethical consumer, and hence at a different level act as unconscious dispositions.

[2] This should be remembered throughout the chapter. I am not talking about the "occasional" ethical purchase, but a commitment to a set of ethical practices.

> first couple of months when I went to Chinese restaurants I ate chicken and then I was able to give that up. I never had any cravings whatsoever, not for burgers. The only cravings I ever had were when I became a vegan and I would desperately want ice-cream or chocolate bars. So that was a bit difficult. I went vegan very gradually as well. I was only a vegan at home, but when I went out I might buy a chocolate bar, so yeah I did it all very gradually.
>
> LESLEY: Well, I'd say I didn't touch any more meat for about the last 12 years really, but before that I didn't eat very much meat. But kinda like if I was served something that had sausage in or something that wasn't like really obvious meat I could sort of like make myself struggle and eat it just, you know, to try and, well I don't know, to try and be polite or whatever. Whereas maybe by the time I got to about the age of my late teens, early twenties I had the confidence to say "look, no, vegetarian"

Although there are specific difficulties attached to each issue addressed by ethical consumerism, none of it is done without some cost to the individual[3]. Such costs may well be more time and price orientated when related to environment and fair trade ethics. As Julie shows above, the consumer environment is still structurally deficient in terms of providing any form of equality of choice. In the cases of vegetarianism and veganism, and as demonstrated by Lisa and Lesley, these costs become more personal, being both hard to achieve physically, through the overcoming of desires and nutritional culture shock, and by disrupting normal consumption behaviours. As a change in diet is a highly visible process requiring the family to structure mealtimes differently for children and hostesses to accommodate different ways of eating, it involves effort from more than just the self, especially if the conversion happens as a child. In Lesley's case she describes herself as quite a timid child, and so becoming vegetarian would have meant stepping outside of the social norm, unwillingly impacting heavily upon her chosen patterns of conformity both within society and the family. As Warde and Hetherington note, becoming and staying a vegetarian in a family context is very difficult (1994: 772). It would appear from the interviewees that, whether you want to or not, choosing to add certain ethics to your consumption equation necessitates "becoming" an ethical consumer.

> LIZZY: It took me about six months to say; my sister had gone vegetarian and stopped after four months and I think [my parents] just

[3] This is not to say that those costs are not offset by the less recognisable gains necessary for rational action, i.e. feelings of empowerment, positive self-image, and as I shall try to highlight throughout the empirical chapters generally the same pleasures associated with conventional consumption.

> thought "Oh God, it's another fad", but actually they were really good and they just agreed to disagree about things.

In keeping with the argument that you "become" an ethical consumer, rather than simply adding on ethics to the list of concerns in consumer choices, is the fact that the consumers could tell stories about the reactions of others. Ethical consumerism provokes open, often verbally aggressive, reaction from friends and relatives. Consider the following quotes:

> SUSY: Um, oh I was really, it just sort, well my mum just thought I was stupid and it was a phase, and my granny on my mum's side ... she thought it was a phase I was going through and I would just grow out of it, just like my left wing tendencies: "oh it's just a phase, she'll grow out of it". I'm 24 and I'm not gonna, but er, that's one sort of reaction, that it's a phase and I'll grow out of it. My mum just thought it was a nuisance.

> CATH: ...you get the, um, "Oh if you are vegetarian why are you wearing leather shoes?" you know, and "Do you eat fish?", and people would constantly want to have a go at you I think, you know.

Although the ethical consumers I interviewed were eager to protect ethical consumerism, and therefore to play down the negative aspects[4], even those who denied that there had been any negative reactions to their becoming an ethical consumer could inadvertently tell stories about the comments of friends, colleagues and relatives[5]. It would appear that just as Mead saw the project of the self as having meaning through the reaction of others (cited in Campbell, 1995: 115), so too has it meaning for others. The reasons for this, I suspect are multiple: the rejection of shared values; the ethical consumers' own claims to being right; and the fact that the conventional consumer probably does not believe in ethical consumerism. Generally new fashions have always been seen as an affront to the established morality (Campbell, 1995: 56). Whilst this may be seen as unfortunate from the position of the "traditional" morality, it remains somewhat removed from

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[4] Only Lizzie and Mary reported positive reactions to becoming ethical consumers. Lizzie had a concrete example of why people thought it was a good thing, suggesting that her schoolfriends saw her becoming vegetarian as a measure of independence from her parents.

[5] My partner became vegetarian a few months ago and I was surprised by the reactions it provoked, especially from his family. The surprise came not so much from the fact that he did get harrassed, but more because it was almost identical to the reactions I received when I became vegetarian. This included a lot of comments which ran along the lines of "umm, I'm eating a lovely dead pig", to which I can find no obvious comparisons in the normal reactions to a consumer choice.

the self. How much more provocative, then, a new morality which outrightly claims to be stronger than the old. Although the ethical consumers generally tried to reassure me that they did not preach about their ethical consumption, it became apparent that for many of the interviewees this decision was based upon negative experiences of doing just that. The interviewees talked about ethical consumerism as being something "all-consuming" in the beginning, and being "very intense" when they had just become ethical consumers. Such feelings would undoubtedly lead to behaviour likely to cause tensions between conventional and ethical consumers:

> ANNABEL: I learned quite quickly not to speak as much about it to people who obviously weren't interested, especially as I was still finding my own feet anyway and you can't be too dogmatic.
>
> CATH: ... I don't know, I am going to carry on doing my bit, making people feel guilty.

Society has always held a plethora of moral discourses, and consumer society is no exception. Thus to sketch out some contradictory discourses, environmental protection is an imperative, and yet so too is consumerism as a tool for economic and cultural good; Britain is a nation of animal lovers and yet intensive farming became a necessary evil in the wake of rationing after the Second World War; religions have always been based upon some sense of justice and equality, but equality of trading relations is antipathetic to capitalism. Whilst the former parts of these dualisms may reflect the sentiments of society (through hegemonic discourses from the media, religion and politics), the latter parts have become the normalised context for consumer behaviour. This split becomes represented as the difference between attitude surveys showing huge numbers of people believing that ethics are important considerations in consumption choices, and the reality of very few ethical purchases in practice. The dominance of topical ethical discourses and the huge numbers of people admitting concerns in market research suggest that people are neither ignorant of the issues surrounding consumption practices or confused about the orientation to the good. Rather than a straightforward lack of awareness, conventional consumers have reasons for rejecting ethical consumption (Macnaghten and Urry, 1998: 212): higher costs, inefficacy, lifestyle limitations, and as Sadalla and Krull (1995) show, the negative impacts on social identity. Antagonism towards the ethical consumer concurs highly with the ethical consumer's own beliefs about those consumers who appear more "ethical" than

themselves (I shall return to this in Chapter Four). In short, ethical consumerism is seen as irrational behaviour by the norms of society.

Indeed, the irrationality of ethical consumerism is demonstrated by the whole *raison d'etre* of consumer society, both through those consumption literatures which theorise the ideal consumer as a pleasure seeking hedonist (Bourdieu, 1994, Maffesoli, 1997, Campbell, 1987), and in its interface with free market capitalism:

> PAM: When I worked at the Commonwealth Secretariat it was like, um, being concerned about the environment, it was like a swearword, you know, because you were anti-growth and I was anti-trade.

Moral discourses in society have traditionally been about renunciation and prohibition, and vegetarianism and environmentalism have become part of a new pattern of renunciation (Schulze: 1997: 39-40). In a consumer society where hedonism and an ethic of self-interest are often seen as the consumer's right and duty, the ethical consumer's ostensible self-abnegation offers a serious challenge to dominant ideologies and the perceived possibilities for self-love and happiness:

> SUSY: ...and there were things at Christmas time, they'd say "oh go on treat yourself" and you would get reactions like that. And it's like "look that is not actually the point" [*we both laugh*]. I'm not denying myself something, I actually don't want to eat meat. So you have got things like "Oh go on, don't be so hard hearted on yourself, treat yourself".
>
> JANE: [My mum] will get me something and I'll say "oh mum it's got that in it" and sometimes I'll just take it because it's easy and she really feels like you miss out because you don't have chocolate, but there are so many products which you can have. This is the thing. I think people think that it is a sacrifice and a denial and really hard work, and it is not at all.

The ethical consumers' transcripts were full of examples about the change that ethical consumerism had wrought in their lives, whether this be the physical revulsions individuals now felt on smelling meat or coming into contact with conventional cleaning products, the openness to spirituality, or the increased ability to see through advertising ploys and political manipulation. For these ethical consumers then, ethical consumerism was not just seen as a matter of changing their consumption practices, but as a broader process of self-development and conscious raising:

> AMY: I used to believe the old saying that "ignorance is bliss", but once you know you can't turn back, there is no way you can turn back [*yeah*], just there is this conscience inside, this soul that knows that the only way is forward, so yeah. Yeah, I have been doing it for a long time in many ways and each little addition is just something else, and most of it is just a way of life.

Moreover, the ethical consumers were convinced of the permanence of this change: when questioned they were sure that they would never stop consuming ethically, although they knew that other people did. There was a general feeling amongst the ethical consumers that they had a greater degree of empowerment than conventional consumers, indeed even a measure of sympathy for those still unable to enjoy the power held by the consumer to determine the shape of the world. A number of the interviewees expressed a sense that they had achieved a release from oppression and manipulation (of the like described by Galbraith, 1958, Packard, 1961 Marcuse, 1962 or Haug, 1986) which the conventional consumer had failed to achieve. Cherry, as an environmental activist over-and-above being an ethical consumer, is an extreme example of this:

> CHERRY: I think that if I could change the way that people think and make them more aware of their lives and if they questioned what was going on really, I would be doing them a really big favour actually 'cos the oblivion that those people live in, the ignorance those people live in is quite depressing and sad really.

In short, ethical consumption in terms of the committed ethical consumers I interviewed, is about doing something different to conventional consumption. It remains an economically and, in the simplest definition, hedonistically irrational activity. The reactions of conventional consumers only further endorsed ethical consumers' feeling that their consumption practices, especially in relation to vegetarianism and veganism, were seen as constituting an alternative way of living, if not thinking:

> JANE: [My mum] doesn't really understand it. When I was having April she thought I wouldn't breast feed and she said "I'm really worried you are not going to breast feed" and I said "Why not?", and she said "Because you don't believe in milk" [*yeah*] and I said "Mum, you've got it completely wrong [*I laugh*], there is nothing wrong with me feeding a baby or a cow feeding a cow, but I don't want my baby to drink a cow's milk." and she had just got into this state of complete panic that I wasn't going to breast feed this baby because I was against milk. She must have thought that I'd just woken up one morning and turned against milk. She doesn't understand at all.

Morality or self-interest

There are two predominant reactions to my telling people that I am studying ethical consumerism. First, some argue that all consumption is ethical; I have tried to show that there are differences between this type of consumption and conventional consumption, without however denying that all consumption can be seen as ethical For example through notions of love and care (see de Vault, 1991 and Miller, 1998)[6]. Second, some argue that there is no such thing as ethical consumption. If this comment refers to the impossibility of purchasing any product devoid of negative impacts, then there may be some validity to the claim. However if this argument is supposed to suggest that there is no such thing as altruism, and that without altruism there is no such thing as ethicality, then the issue has intriguing implications for the motivations to become an ethical consumer. This next section, therefore, examines the relationship between the consumers' stories of their original inspirations to consume ethically and notions of morality and self-interest. In so doing, I shall begin to show the striking differences between the consumers' motivations, which defy easy characterisation[7].

As I outlined in Chapter One, social psychology and sociological studies have related environmental and animal welfarist behaviour to sociality, identity and lifestyle concerns, underpinned by a variety of psychological processes. Obviously the sorts of ethical consumers I interviewed combined many of these factors in complex ways. I shall not even pretend to be equal to the task of theorising a complete and necessarily deterministic interpretation of the processes involved in the motivations to become an ethical consumer. However, I hope to show that the stories of the original factors encouraging the introduction of ethics show often surprising motivations: for some ostensibly ethical, for others self-interest, but mostly existing between these two polarities. I shall examine two main areas where ethical consumption can be theorised as self-interest: health, and identity and lifestyle construction.

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[6] Although Miller distinguishes between the "cold" ethics of ethical consumerism, and the "warm" morality of love (Miller, 1998: 16)

[7] I am aware that the term "Motivation" is controversial. Campbell (1999) points out that sociologists have tended to view talk of "motives" as equating to some form of behaviouralism, where action is performed as the result of stimulii rather than through free will. I use the word motivation in this chapter to connote that the actions of the ethical consumers have reasons, and not that they act unthinkingly or without free will.

The role of health

Health has become a vigorous discourse across food issues in recent years, and whilst it is not so explicit in other consumer arena, health issues are similarly relevant to areas such as household cleaners and personal hygiene products. Since the marked increase in the links between health and diet, food has become inextricably caught up with images of risk and good/ bad things to eat (Warde, 1997: 87). Much of what can be classified as ethical food choices can also be seen as health choices: for example, organic produce can be seen to reflect concern for the environment .or animal welfare, and at the same time is now viewed as far healthier given intensive pesticide use and BSE; vegetarianism has passed through the days of being associated with vitamin deficiencies and anaemia and is now viewed as a health conscious diet. Choosing to become an ethical consumer out of health concerns offers an arena where self-interest could prove to be a more likely motivation for certain consumers than moral responsibility.

Amy who is in her 40s, and currently unemployed as she has M.E., describes her becoming an ethical consumer as follows:

> AMY: I became interested in, er, wholefoods and vegetarianism when Sarah was a baby [*right*], because I lost the use of my back neck muscles and I had to go to an osteopath and he changed my diet completely [*really*]. I met a couple who were interested in wholefoods and we were vegetarian for a year and that's when I really became interested in pesticides and all we're doing to ourselves. At the same time, no before that Ron had to go to hospital when he was tiny and there was one day when he had to go down to the children's day centre, because he couldn't have any food that day. So while they were eating I took him away 'cos he was going down to theatre afterwards. And this children's day centre was packed, absolutely packed with children. And I said to this guy "which clinic is this?" and it was the leukaemia clinic [*right*]. All these children had leukaemia and there had been a terrific upsurge in children's leukaemia and the doctors thought it was to do with frozen vegetables [*really?*]. And it was 24 years ago and that really shocked me and that made me start to look at what I was giving him. So that was the beginning of my starting to look at Bird's Eye trifles and Angel's Delight and all those things came off the shopping list and frozen things, we started to grow ourselves, and pre-packed foods, pre-prepared foods and I went over the top after that really.

Amy, along with Ruby and Rachel, admits that her foremost reasons for consuming ethically are health related. Nearly all of the interviewees however mentioned health in their interviews as though to reinforce the fact that their choices were the right ones. I will examine the role of health in ethical choices more fully in Chapter Five, but for the moment I will simply suggest that health (especially as a prominent discourse in contemporary society, and particularly when related to food) is highly interwoven with notions of "good" and "ethical" in the interview transcripts. The ethical consumers justify their ethical and their conventional consumer choices through their beliefs in what constitutes "healthy". At the same time an ethical choice which is strongly believed to be unhealthy is less likely to be consumed than other ethical choices. Moreover, Beardsworth and Keil (1997: 234) found in their work on vegetarians that the motivations to consume ethically changed over time, as the continuing exposure to relevant information allowed the self-interested to become more aware of the ethical side of their food avoidances, and vice versa and Amy certainly followed this pattern:

> AMY: I saw a programme on Channel Four about chicks, and how these beautiful chicks are on a production line and were just thrown in plastic bags alive and just discarded, and I've never eaten chicken since then: so that wasn't a health issue with chickens, because I couldn't stand to see them and I didn't want to be a part of that.

The reinforcement of one motivation with another allows the consumer to feel more rational in her choices, reducing the negativity surrounding ethical consumerism: much of the information acquired by the ethical consumer is used as evidence of the rationality of their practices (see next chapter for a full discussion of this point). Interestingly, all of the interviewees who were vegetarian for health purposes had an on-off commitment to vegetarianism, suggesting that health is not as strong a motivator for ethical consistency as is moral responsibility - unsurprising given the twin discourses of health and indulgence related to food (Warde, 1997).

Identifying ethical consumers

Unsurprisingly given the negative reactions received by the ethical consumers, the public perceptions of what type of people ethical consumers are is not exactly the most flattering. The reactions reported by the ethical consumers left little room for doubt that the image of an ethical consumer is not exactly filled with glamour:

> LISA: In the United States when I was growing up Vegetarianism was like saying you believed in a flat earth or something.

PAM: Mostly people thought I was a bit batty.

LESLEY: I think my friends actually thought that that was the choice I made because I was soft and sweet, that is the kind of feedback I would get from it.

JANE: [My partner], his old friend has got a new girlfriend who is vegan and he did say to me "She's really lovely, but she is a typical vegan" and I said "What does than mean?" [*right*] and he said "She looks really undernourished" and I've met her now and she doesn't [*I laugh*], it's just his stereotype and she looks really healthy [*yeah*] and he's met all these healthy looking vegans and he's still got these awful stereotypes of denial and not looking healthy ..

If one of the primary functions of contemporary consumption is to use the signs conveyed by objects to create an identity for one's self, wherein lies the relationship between ethical consumption and the construction of a social identity? "Gullible", "weird", "idealistic", "embarrassing": given the negative perceptions that conventional consumers hold about ethical consumers, it would seem likely that the interviewees were holding a moral position in the face of an undesirable social identity. However, it is undeniable that the majority of the consumers I interviewed showed a high correlation between their lifestyle choices and their consumption choices. Rachel, Pam, Susy, Julie and Cherry are primarily involved in some form of campaigning as their occupation. Lesley, Jo, Jane, Lizzie, Mary, and Lisa are involved in some form of campaigning which occupies a substantial amount of their life. Cath had at one time run a health food cafe, and Annabel was involved with around 20 different charities. The only other interviewees not having jobs or interests that are closely linked to ethical consumerism are Amy and Ruby. Both of these interviewees freely admit to their ethical consumption being linked to their serious health problems, which in turn dictate their lifestyles.

Given that taste is embodied and narratives of the self continuously revised (Giddens, 1991: 5), it becomes impossible to separate whether the individual consumer is purchasing to construct a sense of self or purchasing through a sense of self. With the clear moments of motivation expressed by the ethical consumers it becomes possible to probe deeper as to whether the decision to become an ethical consumer was an expression of what the individual felt it was right to be or what

they wanted to be[8]. I shall examine three interviewees' stories about becoming an ethical consumer, to see how they relate to lifestyle choice and sense of self. Firstly, Lisa.

Lisa is a 23 year old American, studying in England. She says that she has always been a natural non-conformist, never hung around with mainstream kids, and says that Americans disliked her as much as she disliked them. She got into punk music through a dislike of pop music and because it was the only place where people were criticising Ronald Reagan.

> LISA: It was through punk rock that I got into vegetarianism [*right*]. Since sort of mid to late 80s it has been, um, the hard core punk scene it has been on the rise, vegetarianism, veganism [*right*]. And, um, I used to get lots of magazines, lots of fanzines and one of the most popular ones one year was actually a vegan cookbook [*oh right*] which had loads of recipes and essays in it, so I got that and then I became vegetarian.
>
> LISA: I suppose most of the people I correspond with are, um I have got these penpals who are punks all around the world who are vegan and don't drink and don't smoke, like me. It's called straight edge, have you heard of it? [*no*]. Straight edge right. It's something that started in Washington D.C. in the early 1980s and it was basically punks who didn't want to take drugs or smoke [*oh right*] or fornicate [*laugh*] and it became immensely popular in the scene, sort of as personal politics rather than direct action, and it has sort of grown ever since. In the late 80s, um it also came to mean vegetarian or vegan as well. Actually this band [points to her shirt] is one of the first vegetarian straight edge bands and they sing about animal rights, and so on. And so now there are actually scenes all over the world and I get newsletters which have scene reports from Latvia, Singapore and so most of my friends are penpals in Belgium and France and Austria and I do my own Zine [*right*], my own straight edge Zine. At the moment vegetarianism and veganism is really high profile in the hard core scene. I suppose it makes it easier when I know all those people that I have things in common with.

These 'personal politics' (which are about applying your politics to yourself) then help to determine Lisa's consumer stance. The whole Think Global, Act Local scenario of conscientious consumption fits in with the rest of her lifestyle

[8] Of course if you accept that in-depth interviews are about listening to the stories that people tell about themselves, and as such are about the reflexive narratives of the self, then you can argue that they are totally inappropriate methodology for any kind of intervention with identity theories. I personally believe that the stories that my interviewees told me were quite frank, and often highly unflattering to the self, which makes it hard to write them off as an idealised, heavily reviewed biography. Undoubtedly they are simplified by time, but still truthful enough to be of purpose to this debate.

commitments. She identifies implicitly with the cultural scene surrounding her music, to the extent that she says she has no particular ideas as to her ultimate career after finishing university, claiming she is "typical generation X". Lisa fits easily into a profile of a consumer buying to construct a desired identity, far more so than any idea of following through a personal moral standpoint. She sees herself as being part of group, to whom she relates in the sense of an imagined community or member of a sub-culture. Any negative aspects of social identity associated with her vegetarianism are minimised by the sense of group belonging, and the desire for non-conformity, although she finds the more open-minded attitudes of the English towards both vegetarianism and sub-cultures a relief following the continuous stares of her countrymen.

This was an extreme example of an identity-led explanation of the motivations to ethically consume. For ethical consumers like Lisa, ethical consumption can be viewed through the use of consumption-identity theories which suggest a more social proposition for identity. This is a lifestyle constructed largely for social display and a close identification with other punks sharing a similar set of lifestyle practices. Whilst it is obviously based upon Lisa's values, it says little about an ethical relationship to the producer/produced.

The majority of the ethical consumers at some time mentioned notions of what they believed it was good to be, often telling stories of role models who had influenced their decisions to be ethical consumers (see section on friends and family). This suggests that ethics and identity are intricately linked, but in a more complicated relationship than purchasing an ethical social-identity. Pam, a postgraduate in her 50s, originally from Canada, but resident in England for the last 25 years, has no easy identity links to ethical consumerism. This is not to say that there are no links, but these cannot be classified as primarily about identity construction. Pam says that she has always been very critical of consumption activities, having grown up in a family crippled by consumer debt. At the age of 14 she was writing essays at school highlighting the "evils of consumer debt". At university she became politicised by the Vietnam War, but her consumption activities were limited to taking her time to purchase the loss leaders across a range of supermarkets. She was following a pretty conventional lifestyle until:

> PAM: I had this vision of myself as successful. This bloke wanted to marry me, I discovered I was a high-flier in the Canadian Civil Service, I had my whole life stretched out ahead of me; husband, kids, good job, nice house and it appalled me, so I picked up the phone and called [Canadian Service Overseas] and asked them if they needed people with my background, and six weeks later I was on the training course and off to Zambia.

After marrying a man she had met on VSO, and spending a few years working in both Canada and Zambia, Pam returned to University to take a postgraduate diploma in Business. It was on her course that the original motivation to consume ethically came.

> PAM: I had a marketing course and we had a case study on pet food and I decided I wasn't going to buy, wasn't going to have pets, because I didn't think it was right that, at that time lifeboat theory was very popular and people were saying that there wasn't enough food for people in the Third World and they needed to be jettisoned and Kissinger was talking about Bangladesh as a basket case and saying that there were certain countries that couldn't be developed and so they shouldn't be helped. And at this time American pets were consuming enormous amount of high quality protein and it was because they had effective demand, the owners could afford to buy the food and therefore they were going to get the food where people in the Third World weren't. And my conscience wouldn't let me purchase for my pets in that context, and I still won't have a pet, my daughter has a tarantula, but I won't have pets that I have to purchase pet food for. I think there's something almost sick about a society that invests as much of its disposable income in pets and animals. So that was my first consumer conscious, where I had an ethical decision and I refused to consume a product because of it.

Pam had rejected a successful and conventional lifestyle, for one that she felt happier with, several years before her first decision to ethically consume. Even as a school child Pam had been reading literature on consumption issues, such as Galbraith's *Consumer Society* and Wiley's *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit*. She expresses her decision to not have pets as political. Her decision to work for CSO, and remain in a relatively unmaterialistic lifestyle, would now be viewed as "down-shifting", and as such linked to an ethical consumer lifestyle, but these considerations were not brought together at that time. The beginning of her consumer ethics is difficult to redefine as an identity statement, or as strict self-interest: deciding not to have a pet out of concern for Third World justice is hardly a conveyer of commodity signs. However, in common with all the other interviewees who came to ethical consumerism through Third World concern, Pam claims that she was very religious, although she had lost her original faith and become a Humanist, and later went on to join the Quakers because they shared

her views on development strategies - suggesting a deeper notion of the links between identity and consumption.

I do not believe that becoming an ethical consumer in any way constituted the following through of a lifestyle choice for Pam: I suggest that the decision to introduce consumer ethics was a moral decision. However, it is likely that the former rejection of materiality allowed Pam the freedom to introduce ethical consumerism into her purchasing practices without compromising any other area of her life. This reduction in the necessity for behavioural change makes it far more likely that the consumer will support an issue in which they believe (Ungar, 1994: 291). Pam eventually became highly influential across the ethical consumer movement, and was involved in early environmental and developmental networks. This unity of lifestyle, consumer practices and ethical beliefs can be seen as providing a consistent sense of self over the long term. Indeed Pam herself mentions certain consumer choices as allowing her to feel constancy of self (and not a creation of a desirable social-identity).

The closeness of consumption to other areas of life were emphasised by several other interviewees, who gave their work with environmental and developmental organisations as the motivation for certain areas of ethical consumption.

> JULIE: I suppose one of the things is that ethical consumption is not an isolated part of life, it is related to things we do on a campaigning level, and the money that you spend relates to the other things that you are concerned about, so some of the other campaigns I am involved in touch particularly on ethical consumption ... those are all again very much about linking the theory of what ought to happen with what you do in practice.

In these cases where lifestyle, self-identity and ethics have a certain unity, the interaction between ethics and identity can be informed by Taylor's (1989) notion of the self, where all choices are based upon a moral framework which limits our agency by orientating us towards our own sense of the "good". As these frameworks include an understanding of who it is good to be, as well as providing a sense of who I am, the self is capable of change and a measure of reflexive ethicality, but only within certain constraints (Taylor, 1989: 26-50). Whereas Baudrillard's consumers create a sense of identity through purchasing appropriately signed commodities, rather than purchasing goods to express a sense of who they already are (Bocock, 1993: 67), Taylor would suggest that these ethical consumers are purchasing through rational political or ethical ideals essential to their self-identity. Taylor's thesis resonates with Chaney's (1996: 8)

conception of a lifestyle as a set of practices imbued with ethical and aesthetic significance; a way of living which is fundamental to a sense of identity. This suggests that these consumers do not find ethical consumerism a barrier to desirable self-identity, and indeed the interviewees appeared to derive a positive sense of self through viewing themselves as intimately entangled with their personal beliefs.

Consistent with Ungar's (1994) findings that people are unlikely to act upon an issue they believe in if it means inconvenience to themselves, Colby and Damon (1993) in their work on the development of extraordinary moral commitment found that a high degree of connection between personal goals and moral goals was instrumental in allowing moral behaviour. The unity of self and ethics reduced the conflict between different desires which could prevent action. Therefore, those people whose moral goals are central to their personal identity will be more likely to act on a belief than others who hold the same belief, but regard it as peripheral to their lifestyle[9]. The link between the importance of moral concerns to a sense of the self and action, is reflected in the unity between judgement and conduct (Colby and Damon, 1993: 152). This constancy of identity and ethics leaves the individual feeling that they have no choice other than to follow through their moral beliefs (Colby and Damon, 1993: 169). Colby and Damon's way of viewing the link between identity and action reflects the narratives of the majority of the ethical consumers I interviewed far more closely than any theory about depthless identity construction, or straightforward social display. This is probably more so than for most ethical consumers because of the strong degree of identification with the issue which provoke these individuals to come forward to be interviewed in the first place.

I have one final point to make at this juncture concerning the links between identity and ethics in motivating ethical consumers. This is quite an obvious point, for some people identity construction and lifestyle choice have little to do with ethical consumerism - as shown by the interviewees who described their original incentives for ethical consumerism as health-related in the previous section. I want to look here at Mary's ethical consumption biography, which poses challenges to the previous consumption-identity theories. Take Mary's explanation of the moment when as a child she decided to become vegetarian.

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[9] All of which is not to say that conventional consumers are morally devoid: over-riding concerns could be to provide their children with the best of everything or to place self-love before external moral-duty.

MARY: I had this pork chop when I was 12, I think it was a pork chop, yeah if it was a pig it was pork. And it was about that size [shows me with her hands], this big bit of gristle, and I cut into what I thought was just flesh, I cut into this bit and tasted it and it was sort of just offal, and it was like "Oh God, that's disgusting", and um, on the bits of gristle sticking out it were like strands of hair [*right*] and I just like, it was like pigs hair sticking out or pigs bristle, and across the bits of gristle were the skin and bone sticking, and there was a number stamped on the back, and it was just sort of like, er, I'll never do that again.

|

ME: You said you made a connection there, can you explain what you meant?

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MARY: Well, I mean just that the hair being there first of all, and like the actual taste and feel of it that was like "oh My God". I just didn't really pay attention before [*right*], it was just meat and two veg, but that was just sort of like this is [lost in background noise], especially when I saw the number stamped on the back as well.

|

ME: So that was when you realised this was an animal?

|

MARY: Yeah.

|

ME: So did you not want to eat it because it had been alive or what?

|

MARY: Well, just that it had been alive and it had been killed on my behalf. It tasted disgusting anyway. It's not that I found meat disgusting, it's just that I could take or leave it. I just used to eat what was put in front of me, but once I found that out, that I just thought "Well, I don't really like it that much anyway, it's not going to kill me to give it up".

So rather than having anything to do with identity constructs, or lifestyle choices, Mary's decision to become an ethical consumer is based upon a moment of gustatory disgust, which led to an ethical connection. The whole fetishisation of the commodity has collapsed: meat no longer means tasty food, healthy food, good food (Fiddes, 1991), it means dead animal. The dissociation of meat from animal (Plous, 1993: 14) has been overcome[10], the intermediaries in the commodity chain which separate us from our consequences (Lachs, 1981: 12) have been removed, and Mary, still a child, has accepted responsibility for the death of an animal. Mary removes for herself the barriers between action and inconvenience by stressing the unimportance of meat in her life. This represents a moral relationship, which has increased over time, with Mary eventually becoming vegan, rather than a lifestyle choice.

[10] As the most notable everyday method of dissociating meat from animals is the use of separate terminologies for dead and live animals, it is worth noting that Mary deliberately stresses that pork is a pig.

However, even in cases where social identity plays no role in becoming an ethical consumer, there are impacts upon a consumer's social identity. Throughout the interview Mary resisted suggestions that her choice of career (Mary was at the time a nanny, but had worked in close connection with fair trade organisations, and was intending to become an environmental studies student) had anything to do with her consumption practices, and even more strongly resented the idea that her lifestyle was in any way alternative (going as far as to argue that living in a squat was quite mundane really). Mary saw herself as ordinary, down-to-earth and unconnected to any other ethical consumers. Unlike several of the ethical consumers she displayed none of the "badges" of ethical consumerism. For Mary being an ethical consumer was about what you buy and not what identity statement you are trying to make. And yet, even if Mary is not making any direct statement about her identity by becoming vegetarian, this is not to say that other people do not see it as symbolising something more than an ethical judgement. For most of the ethical consumers I interviewed Warde (1994: 891) is correct in saying that identity-value had not entirely supplanted exchange- and use-value, but at the same time Beck and Giddens (cited in Warde, 1994: 881) are correct in believing that "actors are deemed to have chosen their self-images and can thus be held accountable for the end-results". Ethical consumers who are unwilling to accept an imposed (and generally highly undesirable) social identity have to work actively to resist it:

> LIZZIE: People say to me "you don't look like a vegetarian" and I think "what are vegetarians supposed to look like ... I think that is just because [people] are sticking to a stereotype. If you break away from it people notice.

However, as Lesley points out, breaking away from the stereotype is not so easy:

> LESLEY: I think probably the more you actually do, the more you are forced into a certain lifestyle. Because I suppose you are likely to meet like-minded people and then probably the things that you wear would be slightly different and maybe the work that you do.

So for those consumers like Mary, lifestyle choices and identity constructs have a degree of separation from their ethical consumption practices. Instead of using consumption practices to establish an "ethical consumer lifestyle", the unity of lifestyle choice and consumer ethics has a more complex development. Meaningful practices, social networks, even employment become affected by ethical concerns.

The strength of these concerns allows the individual to continue consuming ethically even if they have lost some of their capacity to express what they would feel to be a more appropriate social identity or lifestyle.

So to summarise the argument about the links between identity and ethical consumerism, I believe that no one identity theory can offer a realistic explanation of the processes involved in becoming an ethical consumer. For some consumers, the identification with a sub-cultural grouping/ethical lifestyle is the primary motivation, and they revel in their alternative image. For others (and perhaps the majority), the reason for becoming an ethical consumer is a moral one, but the ethical consumer lifestyle allows for the reduction of dissonance across the individual's belief systems (Rajecki, 1986), even if the social identity is not one which they would have necessarily chosen for themselves. For other consumers, and probably a lot of those who buy ethical products but had no desire to be interviewed as examplars of "ethical consumers", the external imposition of an undesirable social identity and the inevitably of certain lifestyle practices are a frustration. However, the strength of their ethical beliefs allow them to continue to consume ethically at some social cost to themselves. These are the shades of grey which make it impossible to view the relationships between ethical consumption and identity through any single theory. It would appear that how we use these processes of self-identity, identification and lifestyle construction informs our individuality, as much as the identities and lifestyles consequent upon those processes.

When trying to comprehend whether ethical consumerism is an act of self-interest or a moral responsibility it is necessary to keep in mind the fact that as well as being a cognitive and aesthetic being, the individual is also a moral being. It is therefore impossible to separate self-concern or identity from underlying values. The implicit unity between what the individual believes it is good to do and what the individual then offers as a narrative of self renders the notion of altruistic behaviour highly contentious. After all, this is one of the great philosophical arguments: are we, as Aristotle claims, motivated by self-interest or, as Kant claims, by moral duty (Scruton, 1986: 56), and is it possible to separate the two? What is clear is that for the majority of these ethical consumers, the ethical relationship to producer/produced is very real (as I will demonstrate more fully in Chapter Four)

and therefore very little ethical consumption can be reduced to a simplistic notion of self-interest.

The freedom to be ethical

Theories of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1975) see attitudes as being filtered through social norms before being turned into the intention to act. So whilst most people in the First World claim that they would like to see the logging of rain forests stopped (Gunn, 1994: 21), not everybody is in the social situation which makes such action rational. In this section I will suggest that however much ethical consumers construct themselves as acting upon their own beliefs in isolation from everyone else in society, there are certain factors which offer the ethical consumer a social norm more likely to allow the consumer the freedom to be ethical. These freedoms can be seen as an extension of the underlying contingencies of ethical behaviour, such as time, money and the quality of life that allows the possibility for concern for issues beyond the immediate. This section is focused upon changing cultural beliefs, especially those fed through high profile media campaigns or academic theories, the role of socialised ethics from family and religious beliefs, and influences of family and friends.

The changing moralities of society and economy

I have argued that society is filled with a plethora of moral discourses, with the irony of ethical consumerism being that it is the action that falls outside a social norm, and not the philosophy. I want to strengthen this point here by showing that the ethical consumer generally starts to consume ethically within a context where the issue has become relatively high profile for that time and place. Due to the globalised nature of commodity chains and environmental risks, which require mediated forms of knowledge, the consumer is unlikely to be acting in complete isolation[11]. Environmental amelioration in the global context is a contemporary subject: it would have been nigh impossible for anybody to have been a green consumer before the 1960s as neither the environmental problematique or the consumer solutions existed. Whilst British church congregations may have first boycotted sugar plantations using slave labour in the 1840s (Timewatch, 12-5-1998), it is only recently that the institutions within the economy have allowed Third World exploitation under capitalism to be recognised and addressed. Moreover,

[11] With some forms of animal welfare perhaps acting as an exception.

there has been an increase in concern about development issues among the general public. Jo is in her 60s and a former colonial in India, she talks about this change in society's values:

> JO: ..all the question of exploitation we only became aware of it in the 60s, well 70s, 80s when we became, I think these things were talked about more, Friends of the Earth became very active, and then one started to notice them and become educated in these matters. We just took it for granted that tea came from here and coffee from there, and we knew the distribution of these goods and where they came from, but not, not .. Also I took it for granted that tea workers, they worked on the plantations, all right, but they weren't, but having lived in India you knew that they lived in that way and you didn't question it. It is only, the word exploitation really came into my thinking more with regards to the food I was eating much, much later. ... the questioning and all that only comes later on in life with awareness of issues.

For Jo, whereas the production conditions behind a product were simply not an issue in British society fifty years ago, it has now become almost impossible to remain in ignorance of the fact that mass consumption is not without its drawbacks. More generally, it is no longer unusual to be aware of the risks arising from anthropogenic environmental damage, and images of Third World poverty frequently pervade our television news. That 90% of people should say that they placed ethics as a priority in their shopping (Manchester Evening News, 1997) suggests that the notion of a self-interested consumer so beloved of economic rhetoric no longer has the currency it once might have had. Even if all forms of ethical consumerism are still a minority practice, the philosophies which inform them are widespread enough within society to not render the action incomprehensible. Commensurate with this view are the accounts of the older interviewees (those in their 60s) who did not become ethical consumers until the values had already begun to filter through into everyday acceptance in the 1970s/1980s. The interviewees from other countries confirmed the presence of socially and culturally specific norms by their comments on the differences across societies. Ruby, for example, was astounded at the low level of environmental concern and action in Britain as opposed to Canada, while Lisa found it easier to be a vegetarian in a country with stronger animal welfare beliefs than in the United States.

In common with Horwitz's findings on the development of ethics (1996: 41), the ethical consumers I interviewed demonstrated the time and context specific nature

of issue awareness. There were two frequently mentioned sources of awareness raising: the media and academia. Action was far more likely to follow knowledge gained from these "expert" sources if the consumer was already in some way involved in ethical consumerism. In fact only one of the ethical consumers related their first consumer practice to expert sources of information which had not been mediated by friends or family - this was Cath with her admiration for the activism of the newly founded Greenpeace (quoted at the beginning of this chapter). However, in both the prior politicisation of the individual and as a source of new consumer concerns media and academia proved to be highly influential. Julie and Rachel talk about their first awareness of any ethical issues being that of uranium mining. This is specific to both the time-period - the 1970s and the place - both were living in uranium producing countries at the time. Fair trade was linked to the 1970s by those involved in church groups, and the 1990s by those who were not. Environmental awareness was more evenly spread across the last three decades, depending upon the interviewees' age, but with only Pam saying that she had begun to consume environmentally friendly products before the 1980s.

The separation of action from awareness is a widely recognised phenomenon. Newhouse (1990) explains that people use information differently, with some individuals likely to find increased awareness as sufficient in itself to reduce risk perceptions or the need for action. Environmental concern is dependent upon knowing about the impacts and the differences that the consumer makes; fair trade is dependent upon a belief in equality and understandings of the deficiencies of the global trading system; animal welfare concerns are dependent only at times upon specific knowledges of the farming system, at other times rest purely upon a belief in an animal's ability to suffer. Whereas postmodern ethicists believe in non-foundational ethics and pre-social morality (Bauman, 1993: 32) all of these issues have a strong connection to social and cultural norms. Chapter Four will examine this proposition in greater detail. Even where the motivation for ethical consumption appears to be entirely personal, such as in the cases of Lesley, Jane and Lizzie who all believed in childhood that eating meat was wrong, it is doubtful whether they would have acted upon this belief if the moral climate did not already allow some freedom to become vegetarian. Indeed, the three of them struggled for substantial periods of time before admitting their consumer preference. Lizzie alone

was able to achieve vegetarianism in childhood, and she had the dubious advantage of having had her sister turn vegetarian before her.

The influence of family and friends

Many of the consumers saw their actions as being influenced by family or friends who they admired, especially friends of their parents if the individual became an ethical consumer in childhood. Susy is the strongest case of parental influence. Her parents were divorced and her step-mother and father told her about ethical consumerism whilst her mother resisted her becoming an ethical consumer. Susy describes the influences of becoming an ethical consumer thus:

> SUSY: Basically [my step-mum] and dad, they used to buy me really right on presents, fairly traded presents when I was younger and before it was mainstream at all [*hmm*], but it didn't really occur to me what they were, it was just really beautiful African stuff. ... [Vegetarian] the thing that really repelled me was reading an article, I think it was in The Guardian, that my dad had in his house, about battery chickens and that was what started me.
>
> ME: Why did your father have the article lying around?
>
> SUSY: ... I think they showed it to me, they probably showed it to me because my dad was a vegetarian by this point, my step-mum, this is where it all emanated basically because my step-mum was always into social issues and she's a very strong Christian.

Susy's story raises a difficult question about whether she became an ethical consumer through a desire to please, some form of socialised ethics or a choice between the two sets of social norms created by her parents' divorce. Lesley, like Susy, says that she had fair trade bred into her ("... fair trade I suppose was kinda like absorbed into me in a way") almost as a subconscious disposition, and there is obviously some element of socialised norm involved in a child following through their parents' ethics. However, the interviewees only demonstrate one side of the story: after all they, did decide to continue to consume ethically. Narratives which involve the ethical consumers' own children show that the process of socialising norms is not as clear cut, with children often rejecting their parents' consumption choices.

The interviewees who had become ethical consumers before their children were born found it a natural decision to extend their ethics to incorporate their children's

consumption. When the child is young this is easily achieved but, as the child starts to form outside networks, consumer ethics which are at odds with the values of their parents begin to enter the domain of the household. As Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley (1992: 19) point out, the moral economy of the household is always more or less permeable to the interventions of the outside culture. Cath was acutely aware of the impact that the external intervention of advertising could have on her childrens' consumer demands. As a consumer determined to minimise her purchasing she attempted to pre-empt the inevitable targeting of her children's "pester power".

> CATH: The thing that I decided right from the beginning when I had the girls, that um, I wasn't going to let them watch commercial television. I mean stopping them watching television altogether I think is a bit drastic, because you know, I think it makes them a little bit left out when they go to school. But one Christmas I happened to be watching ITV and it was a children's programme and I think 5 out of the 7 adverts were for either junk food, overpriced Christmas toys or sweets. You know it was just crazy and I thought "I don't want them to watch that".

And according to Cath this strategy is paying off, with her eldest child asking for cardboard boxes for Christmas to keep her doll's clothes in. Direct advertising is only one method of creating kids' desires which are in conflict with parents' consumer ethics. Fear of being different to their peer group has considerable impact upon children. Just as the interviewees encountered difficulties by being seen to consume "differently", so too do the children who have never known any other way of consuming. Jane was keenly aware that the unusual consumer ethics she has instilled in her child have the ability to inflict social stigma, at the very least in her child's mind, and she acts to minimise the impact:

> JANE: My daughter likes this thing called *Cheatin' Ham*, because it looks like she has meat sandwiches at school. That's recently come in because she's at a school, at my school where I work mostly, where there's no other vegans and very few other vegetarians. And I noticed she was eating her lunch like this (mimes out opening her sandwiches surreptitiously to see what is inside). So I found this *Cheatin' Ham* in *Bumblebees*. I don't mind, that's fair enough, she must feel pretty outcast about that.
>
> ME: So do the other kids tease her ..?
>
> JANE: No it is her. I doubt they even notice what she has in her sandwiches, but I think she must be one step ahead. She sees what they have, which is meat.

The interviewees with children described similar patterns of behaviour which was highly age dependent. Very young children were perfectly happy with their parents' values, as this represented the norm to them. But as the children start school and socialise outside the home the two sets of norms begin to become difficult to negotiate. The peer-group conscious children start to be embarrassed by their parents' consumer ethics. All the interviewees with older children had seen the rejectionof their consumer ethics; not of course without this causing tension in some of the households. The few who had grown-up children said that their children had once again begun to find space to work out their own values, and some had returned to ethical consumerism:

> JANE: My son was brought up vegetarian and when I became vegan I tried to adapt him, but it was really quite hard because he had got really into cheesy things. And now he has completely turned against it all, and won't have anything to do with health foods or anything I give him, it's like "is this homeopathic, is this vegan?". He will ask like "is this vegan margarine? Oh well, I don't want it then"... Now he is living in Australia with his dad, he's eating meat. He's travelling between different Aboriginal communities and meat eating and fishing are a big part of that culture, so he has changed you know.

> PAM: And as the kids were growing up, at the beginning, my son in particular, took a kind of pride in thinking the way his mum did, and because he was going to Sunday School and Quaker meetings and that's how people thought and stuff. And then it became embarrassing for them and all their friends had trainers with name brands on them and I would buy them stuff that wasn't ... But as they got older and my daughter more than my son, they started to find it embarrassing, you know, this weird mother of theirs that didn't believe in such and such. But then they grew out of it and developed their own tastes and things and had the confidence to make their own decisions. And I think our up-bringing enabled them to be more critical of peer pressure and what they were being asked to do.

Clearly when the interviewee's children are taken into account, the relationship between socialised ethics and the social norm becomes more complex. Rather than simply determining a lifetime of ethical consumerism, being brought up with certain practices outside the norm presents a choice to the individual. Firstly, the child has to believe that the consumer value is correct and that action is rational; secondly they have to have the freedom to follow through that action, which means an understanding that an ethical consumer is something that it is good to be. Returning to the original quotes, we can see that having a personal attachment to

the socialised ethics from their parent's ethical consumerism appears to form part of the equation. Susy talks about becoming more attracted to her father and step-mother, eventually moving to live with them. Her attachment to her step-mother was evident. In that she obviously wanted to situate herself closer to her father's lifestyle than her mother's. Lesley too claims that even though she had fair trade socialised into her, she very much admired a friend of the family who was a fair trader and had therefore been influenced by him.

However, I do not wish to imply that the processes involved in motivating ethical consumption are reducible to a straightforward choice between two ways of consuming. A further dimension is added to the influence of friends and family when, as in the cases of Jo and Annabel, it is the children who introduce ethical consumerism to their parents. These interviewees said that they realised that their children were right in their beliefs, which left them with no legitimate ground for continuing with conventional consumption, as they were perfectly aware of the alternatives. This influence of children on the rest of the family was described by Mary and Lesley, who said that after they became vegetarian other members of the family did the same. The separation of awareness from action has been overcome by others already acting on their beliefs. In these families the social norm that would have held the consumer inactive is no longer a rational or acceptable barrier.

To conclude this section on the freedom to be ethical, it is important to note the effect that shared beliefs can have on action. My consumers mostly saw themselves as acting in isolation, and apart from Lisa and Jane who were inclined to regard vegans as an imagined community, little was mentioned about joining a group as such. However there had been a strong link between fair trade and Christian groups in the 1970s and 1980s. Whilst the interviewees were quick to stress that the Church as an institution could not be viewed as sympathetic to fair trade, Traidcraft stalls have their roots in religious practices, often being held after services, and enmeshed in beliefs about Christian justice and aid[12]. In these cases where a real or imagined community exists, there is a social norm which allows the

[12] The questionnaire findings support this view. Cross-tabulation revealed that the ethical consumers were more likely to develop fair trade as their first consumer ethic if they were practicing Christians. Questions about whether family and friends were also ethical consumers showed the unlikelihood of acting in isolation. Only 6% of the sample said that none of their family consumed ethically, and only 7% said that none of their friends bought ethical produce.

individual "... to locate those issues against a background of a shared culture which gives them significance" (Cottingham, 1994: 173). The consumer is able to reduce the impact of acting in opposition to an established value and can, therefore, feel their consumer behaviour is rational and based on shared values.

I do not argue that all ethical consumerism has its roots in some form of social influence. The effect of social norms is more subtle than that. Rather, social norms render the philosophy behind the action more concurrent with contemporary moral discourses and offer a reduction to the barriers between beliefs and action, by showing personal obligations to be more an imperative than an act of insanity. The individual has to have at least some consistency between what they believe constitutes a good life, who it is good to be and their consumption practices; this unity is hard to achieve outside some form of social and cultural norms.

From one issue to another

As should already be clear from the diversity of motivations recorded above, the ethical consumer does not take on all of their consumer ethics at the same time. Each consumer lists an individual set of reasons why they embraced their consumer issues, some influenced, some deep-rooted personal beliefs, some ethical, some self-interest:

> LESLEY: Well, it's kinda a thing that has gradually developed since childhood really because, um, I used to kinda like the, um, cruelty to animal issue and issues like that and ever since I was age three and I was kinda told that you have to eat chicken and lamb and it is kinda like quite an infantile dislike then of eating meat [*right*]. I was thinking "oh I don't want to eat these animals that I see about and really love and I don't want to eat them and it kinda developed from there and then as far as fair trade goes we were always quite involved with, um, well my parents were involved with Third World, um, World Development Movement, and I used to go along to the meetings with them as a girl and so sort of like the idea of buying, um, fair trade I suppose was kinda like absorbed into me in a way [*um*] and .. and I suppose some of the people that I respected as I got older have had a similar sort of interests in a way, and perhaps, perhaps that has influenced me as well, cos like for example a, well now I am a fair trader for Traidcraft and I think partly the reason I got interested in doing that was because a very close friend of the family did that and sort of maybe that is part of it.

Untraceable and long standing beliefs about right and wrong, family socialisation and the influence of people that Lesley respected are all involved in motivating her

consumer ethics, and most of the other interviewees showed the same pattern of a variety of different influences. Having started from different places, and with a plurality of motivations, all have gathered a collection of practices related to ethical consumerism. I want to suggest that this is no coincidence: consumers already open to activism will inevitably come across a whole host of similar values and corroborating evidence which confirm the validity of ethical consumerism (I shall talk about this at length in the next chapter). Consumer magazines, green shops and campaigning fairs tend to deal with more than one consumer issue.

> ME: So when did your sort of vegetarian bit move on to kind of environment etc?
>
> LIZZIE: I think it was always pretty much a part of it. I think I became, being vegetarian made me more aware of the environment [*um*] and things like buying non-animal tested things. Then of course, then when I started living away from home, um well, at university things like household products which you have always taken for granted you start thinking "ohh I should look for one not tested on animals". And then when the *Vegetarian Shoe Shop* opened in Brighton .. I started going to Brighton regularly and that started opening my eyes to the *Little Green Shop* and all the things you can buy. And then I started going to the Global Partnership type fairs, so you start being made aware of things like fair trade chocolate and [*yeah*] ..

The belief that environment and development, and environment and animal welfare, are in some way linked was a common theme amongst the interviewees. This is not to say that the one feeds automatically into the other. All remain contingent upon the underlying beliefs of the consumer. Although nearly all the consumers made some mention of their concerns over the unnecessary animal testing for cosmetics, far from all the consumers were morally vegetarian. There is no reason why they should have been, but the fact that this was the one issue area where there was clear disagreement between my informants seems to prove that personal beliefs remain the mainstay of any action, especially as the ethical consumer has already accepted personal responsibility. How the consumer constructs these ethical responsibilities will be examined in the next chapter. Here I simply aim to show that the ethical consumer holds notions that you should do something, however minor:

> CATH: Once I had my children, I really felt, when the green movement was beginning to pick up I said to myself: you know when they have grown up I wouldn't like them to say to me "what did you do to help save the world?", you know, I will say "I was there, I stood my ground".

> RUBY: You have got to do something, even if it is one little thing otherwise how can you live with yourself knowing that that is what is going on and you are not doing anything to help.

The ethical consumer transcripts were full of the notion of "doing my bit" and "every little bit helps". Doing something, as Ruby so graphically demonstrates, is better than doing nothing. It eases the conscience and offers feelings of agency and control in a global situation of which the consumer disapproves. Indeed, I was stunned at the level of optimism demonstrated by the interviewees. Whilst there was a general feeling that things were going to get worse before they got better, most of the interviewees had been ethical consumers for several years and already recognised improvements in both provision and society's values. In short the consumers did not see themselves as involved in a consumer fad. Rather, they are part of the solution to global problems which they had no doubt will be addressed when the rest of society catches up with the necessity that they already perceived:

> LIZZY: Sometimes, when I was younger I used to think what is the point? But it is really interesting seeing how many people have become vegetarian and there is definitely a difference. The very fact that when sanctions were imposed on South Africa it made a huge impact [*yeah*] and I started realising that there is a huge power in the consumer.

Despite the restrictions on their lifestyles, the comments of others, the increased cost and the inconvenience, all of the ethical consumers were genuinely pleased to be ethical consumers. In an overall "cost-benefit analysis" these consumers saw themselves as having gained from their increased awareness and control. They have found a way to deal with global imperatives which have not left them impotent, forced to unthinkingly participate in practices they view as unethical or harmful to the self. It is this positivity which compels the ethical consumer to tackle every new issue which they feel to be of importance, thereby ensuring that ethical consumerism does not become a fossilised set of practices, but an on going process of becoming.

Summary

I have used this chapter to suggest that rather than the consumer adding a further factor to their consumer choices, for these particular interviewees, ethical beliefs have constituted becoming an ethical consumer. This is not in any way the same process for all the consumers, differences appearing across ages, influences and

even moral imperatives. At the same time it is not an easy process, constrained by negative reactions from other consumers, and inconvenience to the self. This negativity is reduced by some measure of social norms which mean that the consumer does not act in complete isolation, and by feelings of empowerment which allow the consumers to feel good about themselves. Once the consumer has accepted responsibility for one set of issues, they are far more likely to act upon others which they become aware of, assuming that they believe in that issue. Hence, ethical consumerism for these ethical consumers can be seen as a continual process of becoming, rather than a temporary reflection of media concerns.

I have started to imply that different issues have different motivations, link to different time periods and social norms. These differences across the issue areas will continue to be examined throughout the empirical chapters. The reasons for becoming an ethical consumer are a complex web of influences, values, social norms and lifestyle choice, which merge with the individual's understanding of what it would be good to be. This renders the decision to become an ethical consumer less determinable than the factors portrayed by social psychological action theories. The complexity of the process of becoming an ethical consumer, and the negative social identities linked with ethical consumerism, begin to explain the gulf between attitude and behaviour so frequently noted by social surveys.

Chapter Four - Constructing "ethical" consumption

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to reveal the processes involved in designing an idealised set of practices to be adopted by the ethical consumer. Once the consumer has accepted that they have a responsibility to act upon ethical issues, decisions have to made about what are the most appropriate actions. I will use this chapter to look at two aspects in the construction of ethical consumption: how the consumer interacts with information and how the consumer rationalises appropriate ethical actions. In expressing the process involved as "rationalisation" I am playing on two different meanings of the concept, both demonstrated throughout the interviewees' narratives. The first is how the consumer determines the methods for achieving desirable outcomes. The second is the rhetorical narrative that the consumer has adopted to justify (or indeed modify) those methods, and hence, the portrayal of themselves[1].

I have structured this chapter to show inter-related aspects involved in constructing personal frameworks of ethical consumption. I will begin with how the consumer decides on the most appropriate sources of information to trust and use. The next section concentrates on how the consumer makes a connection between themselves and a producer/produced (for animals)/affected by production (for the environment) from which they derive their consumer responsibility, and the social processes involved in the consumer's determination of appropriate actions. The final aspect of rationalisation I shall look at is how the consumer defends their ethical position to themselves by denigrating all other positions. Although I have separated rationalisation into these four processes, by no means do I intend to imply that this is a linear process. I wish to make it clear at this juncture that I am

[1] I am indebted to the work of Tehranian for my reading of the concept "rationalisation of action". He suggests that rationalisation has a triple sense. "In a Weberian sense, this means devising the most rational methods of reaching an objective. In a Freudian sense, this means covering up our real motives. In a Marxian sense, it might mean an ideological apparatus that generalises particular interests in terms of the more generalised and socially legitimate interests" (1995: 294). It is worth noting that Tehranian relates this rationalisation of action to discourses involved in propaganda and public relations. In applying his concept selectively to the interviewees' narratives I hope to emphasise the notion that the ethical consumers were using the interview process as a way of promoting their actions and ethical consumerism as a whole.

identifying what should be considered as provisional processes involved in producing an idealised position. The next chapter will deal with the rest of the everyday contingencies constituting consumption, highlighting the differences between utopian and achievable practices. However, because of the importance of information in choosing appropriate ethical goods, the final section of this chapter will examine how the ethical consumer determines the best ethical buy. This section will, therefore, act as a bridge between this chapter and the next.

Knowledge types and information sources

Policy makers and NGOs have tended to view the human being as an "empty bucket": fill with information and the individual will then obligingly moderate their behaviour accordingly (Burgess, 1999). Burgess, along with Macnaghten and Urry (1998), questions the veracity of this sentiment. Most of this chapter is about the ways in which information interacts with action, and I shall suggest that ethical consumers use a variety of forms of information in order to allow themselves the scope to act upon their beliefs. Much of the interview material was designed to look at the role of information in determining the uptake of issues, and questions of trust implicit in the influence of action. What has become clear is that for the committed consumers I interviewed the desire to "do their bit" often precedes knowledge of what would be appropriate actions. Hence, the consumer acts upon trustworthy information, but also acts upon more tenuous sources of information when this allows for action under uncertainty.

Throughout this chapter I will examine the ways in which the ethical consumer uses information, arguing that information is used variously:

1) to aid decisions as to appropriate actions and consumer choices;
2) to aid action under conditions of uncertainty;
3) to provide corroborative evidence to support their ethical positioning;
4) to construct an appropriate narrative of an ethical self.

The ethical consumers I interviewed all showed a mixture of the types of knowledge they used and trusted, and a variety of sources used to collect that knowledge. Only a couple of the consumers claimed that they had not had to go out of their way to acquire appropriate knowledge for ethical consumerism. One of

these was Susy who said that she learnt things through her courses, through her work and from her parents, but did not look for it particularly[2]; the other was Cherry who was an environmental activist and was therefore enmeshed in environmental discourse. Even something as easy as vegetarianism requires years of work in order to get it right, suggesting that a rudimentary amount of knowledge is always necessary for any ethical consumption:

> LIZZIE:...people just don't understand and of course they don't understand because you know what you don't eat, but they just assume that you don't eat meat. Some presume you don't eat eggs, but they don't even think that you won't eat gelatine. Or that gelatine isn't vegetarian. Or that whey for instance if it is from non-vegetarian cheese then it isn't suitable, but if it is from vegetarian cheese then it is suitable. But no-one is going to know that if they are not vegetarian themselves, or have never lived with a vegetarian.

For the most part, my interviewees stressed the work involved in finding out the information necessary to allow them to make the best choices, ranging from always reading the lists of ingredients on the packet to ringing up companies and asking them what their policies are before buying any of their products. Annabel describes her information sources:

> ANNABEL: Mostly from World Vision magazines and things like that ... and WWF, and I am a member of IFAW, and this is where I get a lot of my information. Of course I belong to these people and Friends of the Earth, ... and I have a subscription with the RSPB, and these are the magazines I tend to read. I don't have time to read them all of course, but I tend to read that one cover to cover ... and [Ethical Consumer] I did a bit of trial subscription to that, but it takes a bit of reading though, so I skim through it rather than reading it word for word.

This huge effort to accumulate information from trustworthy experts may appear to be an unpleasant and overwhelming occupation to the observer, and indeed Crang et al (1998) found that their interviewees had contradictory desires simultaneously for more and less information about consumer issues. In general, however, the ethical consumers I interviewed were up-beat about the whole process of ethical consumerism, although Mary stated that she would like to go into a shop and buy something without having to read the label first. Mostly my interviewees were keen

[2] Although Susy did show me a book claiming that humans were meant to be vegetarian. This came about after Susy had cited some information gleaned from the book, and therefore proved that she not only had the book, but had actually read it.

to emphasise the positive aspects rather than the drudgery. Here is Julie enthusing about the information finding process and the acquisition of expertise:

> ME: Do you actively continue to find out new information?
> |
> JULIE: Yes, well that is life isn't it? I mean you don't actually want to stop and say "Okay, I have read this number of books, all knowledge is contained in them and I will work on this information". You would get very bored. So new information coming along, new things to do, it is part of keeping life interesting.

The actual sources of information used to derive both knowledge of issues and of products are startling in their variety. Alongside the expected high-profile issues covered by the news and the campaigns of the pressure groups and consumer groups (of whom there was widespread, active support from my interviewees) were the less well known policies of companies reported in papers, consumer magazines or in-store leaflets. Television documentaries were regularly cited, although several of my interviewees said they tried to avoid watching documentaries which might contain distressing information, particularly if they were already aware of the issue. The BBC's wildlife documentaries were regularly mentioned as sources of information, especially as their information was apparently accepted as uncontentious (cf Davies, 1998). Consumer fairs, academic research, the government, health and nutrition experts, shop assistants and gossip of friends all formed part of the complex web which informed the ethical consumer's choice. From it all the consumer somehow has to decide who to trust and what information it is best to act on: a difficult choice in an area notorious as much for disinformation as no information at all[3].

When I was mapping the interviews, I started by dividing types of knowledge used into the lay/expert categories established as convention in the domain of public understanding of science studies (see for example Wynne, 1996, Irwin and Wynne, 1996). However, it quickly became clear that for an area such as consumption,

[3] Take, for example, the infamous labelling of phosphate free washing up liquid, when no washing up liquid contains phosphates. Or the constant reviewing of the BSE situation - I have a wonderful book on Food Safety written by the Food Safety Advisory Centre in 1991, which whilst being careful never to outrightly state that BSE is not transmittable to human beings, does all it can to offer that impression, including categorically stating that beef is safe to eat (FSAC, 1991: VI-3).

where all knowledge is effectively partial[4], the boundaries of expert and lay became easily blurred. The circulation of information through the media and word of mouth, the trust required (especially for environmental issues), and the personal decoding and appropriation of communicated knowledge make it difficult to define the types of knowledges used by the interviewees as either expert or lay. Instead I have interpreted the processes involved in information collection and knowledge use through the categories of trust developed by McDonell (1997). McDonell posits that trust allows us to draw conclusions in the absence of full information (1997: 838), a condition which typifies the process of ethical consumption. She uses Luhmann's work to suggest that there are two types of trust: personal and system. Personal trust is achieved through everyday interactions with other individuals, whereas system trust is based in the impersonal interactions with individuals and organisations in supposed positions of authority.

Following from this I accept that when making judgements about ethical goods, consumers do so based on different types of knowledge, different sources of information and different connections to trust. Expert knowledges of scientists, academics, companies, government, human and animal rights organisations, and pressure groups are generally subject to system trust. An overwhelming number of the consumers interviewed belonged to consumer magazines or pressure groups from which they derived this "expert knowledge" directly. However, the majority of expert evidence was obtained from mediated sources, such as newspapers, television and product labelling, although the consumers rarely emphasised this.

Those knowledges obtained outside of expert systems I have labelled as personal knowledges, rather than lay knowledges. They include the knowledge that individuals derive from work, protest or life-experiences - hence they can be either lay or expert in nature. The information sources for personal knowledges are those of individual experience; for example, visiting other countries and therefore having first-hand knowledge of working conditions, or seeing for one's self how products are produced. Difficult to pin down, but equally important are those knowledges involving personal trust of friends and family which also fall into the category of

[4] By this I mean that even where the consumer is aware of a particular aspect of a product, it is unlikely that for any product the consumer is cognisant with the precise area of origin of the various ingredients in a product, the wages of the producers, the means of transportation, the policies of the importers and retailers, and the practices supported by the investments of those importers and retailers, and their banking facilities.

personal knowledge. Here the "eye-witness" accounts of friends and family who are involved in production of goods or have seen conditions in other countries for themselves, are filtered in as knowledges available to aid judgements on actions.

Common-sense was revealed as particularly important in decision making for ethical consumerism, and has therefore been separated from other forms of knowledge - although I recognise that it is often personally derived and subject to personal rather than expert trust. Common-sense can be seen as the application of different knowledges to facilitate decisions based on experience and trust in one's own judgement. This allows the individual to make an educated guess without an additional source of information. Using Geertz' framing of common-sense as "... not what the mind cleared of cant spontaneously apprehends; it is what the mind filled with pre-suppositions ... concludes" (1983: 84), it is the level at which commodity fetishism works.

Much of the information used to make decisions, however, contains elements of both expert and personal knowledges, extended through common-sense thinking. Take, for example, the use of information obtained from word of mouth. Listed in the questionnaires as the most popular source of information outside of the Ethical Consumer, word of mouth is an important agent for ethical consumerism. It would not be unusual for an interviewee to explain that they had got their information about a product from their partner, who in turn asked the assistant in the shop - whose own source of knowledge is unknown. This is the everyday world, where expert knowledge is mediated, re-mediated and then accepted through personal trust as well as/rather than trust in expert systems. As a system for collecting usable evidence it is effectively hearsay, but none of the consumers regarded it as such.

Knowledge use for identity creation

In trying to trace the types of knowledge used and the sources of those knowledges, it quite quickly became clear that there was more at stake in terms of knowledge use than receiving the information which allows action: "...knowledge is never simply knowledge of something, it must also be knowledge for someone" (Downey and Rogers, cited in Satterfield, 1997: 443). There is no doubt that the types of knowledge alleged to be used by the ethical consumer have connections

to the type of identity the consumer is trying to portray as posited by Michael: "The use of scientific knowledge and literacy are not simply instrumental, but expressive of self-identity, group membership and political affiliation" (1998: 324). Whilst it is impossible to know what identity(ies) the ethical consumer acts out in other situations, the interview process threw up a clear, and at the time unexpected, relationship between the interviewees' narratives and knowledge types. As shown above, whilst decisions were made based on a variety of forms of knowledge attained through an array of information sources, the majority of the ethical consumers emphasised their use of trustworthy expert sources, suggesting that the consumer was trying to present themselves in a particular way[5].

I want to start by looking at Julie's account of the knowledges she uses. Julie is employed by agencies who are both users and producers of knowledges relating to ethical consumer issues. Throughout both interviews she maintained a narrative in which she positioned herself as an expert, and me as someone she was educating about ethical consumerism, and in assuming this position she was unique amongst the interviewees[6]. Much of her interview was then talked through as "you" meaning "one" as opposed to "I". She was quick to defend the cause of ethical consumerism, constantly working against the social stereotypes of emotional and irrational environmentalists. Part of the construction of both ethical consumerism, and therefore herself as an ethical consumer, as rational involved showing that the knowledge she used was expert and logical, and that she herself was expert in this knowledge:

> JULIE: ... it is very hard to actually identify the different elements, but so much runs together. What you do for ethical consumption depends on what you have read on the theoretical level, which campaigns you have been in touch with, so which ethical issues you are aware of, um and then very importantly there is the information you can get about the different firms, and about the different products and the different considerations.

Tellingly, when I mapped the transcripts of the interviews with Julie the personal and common-sense knowledge categories were empty. This was a woman

[5] The questionnaire sample were more open about their sources of information. After the specialist magazines in which the questionnaires were placed, the most used source of information was word of mouth, followed closely by newspapers.
[6] With perhaps the exception of Pam, who located herself as an expert, whilst treating me variously as an expert or as a student.

portraying herself as well informed and rational by the very nature of the knowledges she expressed as influencing her consumer choices.

Cherry offers a stark contrast to Julie. Cherry was a road protester and is still heavily involved in environmental activism. She undoubtedly holds vast quantities of expert and personally experienced knowledges, but alongside it has an intense lack of respect for office workers (and quite clearly she included me in that category). She has constructed herself as an activist, and ethical consumerism is only bearable to her as part of a grassroots act of protest. Listen to the difference between her narratives of the knowledges she holds and those put forward by Julie:

> CHERRY: Um, I mean I don't know what biologists and environmental scientists are saying about it really, and I don't really want to know.

Despite obviously knowing a lot she plays down this knowledge, both to position herself in opposition to the knowledge producers, and mainstream society, and to position ethical consumerism as a process open to everybody. Watch the confused narrative concerning the knowledges she holds in response to my suggesting she knew a lot about consumer issues:

> CHERRY: [pause] It's not so much information as much as common-sense. When you take a product and you actually look at it, for example *Tizer* [points to some on the side] and you think about the packaging, where it's come from, what additives are in it, you know, it's quite, you just generally have to apply the amount of knowledge you know about corporate business, which I know a lot about anyway from environmental stuff, to commodities that you are consuming, and it's like common-sense. I haven't really read that much literature about ethical consumption, I'm just adding the little bit I know about ethical consumption to the large amount of scope I know about companies like ICI and things like that. So it's more to do with my overwrought imagination. I mean I do think a lot about my ethics of consuming.

So whereas Julie sees expert knowledge as essential to ethical consumption, Cherry denies that she holds expert knowledge about products (only companies, and the separation of the product from the company is an unusual one to make for an ethical consumer) and places common-sense knowledge as all that is necessary in choosing the right products. This is essential to the idea that consumption is about more than simply the act of buying a product. What both these interviewees show is their awareness of the type of identifying I and, through

my work, others will be likely to be doing, and both then present narratives conducive to the image they wish to present. What forms of knowledge one is perceived as acting upon are therefore highly important to how the consumer rationalises their practices.

Ethical constructions and ethical actions

I will use this section to examine how people use information and social norms to construct their ethical responsibility to a "distant other". Rather than being premised upon proving a particular theory of ethics, I have tried to listen to the expressions of ethical values and connections to producers with an open mind. It became apparent to me within the space of the first two interviews that if you ask an ethical consumer how they relate to the producer through their product choices, they feel it to be necessary to put forward a rational and obvious relationship between them and those they are protecting, whether this is the case or not. I, therefore, stopped asking the consumer to externalise their ethical constructions, and simply listened to what they had to say. As expected from this method, not everybody explained their practices in an explicit manner, but at least those that did are as honest as it is possible to achieve in a methodology such as this. However, the need to defend certain concerns and practices more than others proved to be highly illuminating.

Often those few theorists involved in ethical consumerism, especially those who were primarily involved in looking at environmental friendly consumption, have uncontentiously subsumed animal welfare and fair trade into their environmental theorisations (Lancaster Environment and Sustainability Forum; 1998, Macnaghten and Urry, 1998). Indeed, even Barratt Brown, one of the very few people to write about fair trade, appears to view fair trade as an extension of green consumerism through the notion of "sustainable development" (1993:179). By examining each of the issues areas separately though, I want to suggest that how ethical responsibilities and action are constructed is highly dependent upon the social and cultural history underlying the particular movements. That there is more than one way to construct ethical responsibility becomes increasingly clear as each aspect of ethical consumerism has different ethical constructions. As expected the most complex of these is the relationship to the environment, once more ensuring that green consumerism remains a more complicated issue than animal welfare concerns or fair trade.

Fair trade and Third World concerns

Out of the three issue areas I examined, fair trade was always the one which was least talked about. Partly this was because it was the area where consumer action was at its most limited, but I suggest that it is also because it was the issue least likely to be subject to uncertainty, either in terms of information or ethical relationship. Starting with information, few of the consumers talked about their sources outside of the original motivation to consume fair trade products. Whilst those working with agencies promoting fair trade or debt relief had obvious connections to up-to-date news, the only consumer who had no direct involvement with a group to mention information sources about conditions in the Third World was Annabel:

> ANNABEL: [I get my information] mostly from *World Vision* magazine and things like that. And I belong to *World Vision* because I support a child in the Third World and they keep an eye on these things anyway.

For the rest of the consumers, it appears that the situation in the Third World is so apparent that it is unnecessary to explain exactly what the problem is that is being addressed. This differed from the explanations that I received from the majority of the ethical consumers about the role of *Nestlé* and their baby milk marketing. Here the consumers felt the need to explain both the issue and to cite the sources of that information. Time-space compression has ensured that images of an impoverished Third World have filled our television screens, overcoming the distanciation of the producer-consumer chain and offering a (fairly imaginary) sense of knowledge of the producer to which the consumer can relate. The ethical point being that the Third World is subject to poverty whilst the First World has an unprecedented quality of life. This is a fact of life, known by all the interviewees and unquestionably "correct". Unlike Nestlé's marketing strategies, deforestation or pate de fois gras it needed no explanation.

In terms of the narratives about the ethical consumer's relationship to Third World producers, the little that was said was both straightforward and showed startling similarities across all the consumers. What follows is the majority of comments on the individual's construction of ethics for fair trade:

SUSY: Well yeah, the fair trade thing, it is the link between treating the producers well, that is why I buy fair trade stuff, because I know the money is going to the right people.

CATH: I mean I get things out of Traidcraft, again you know, I like the idea of them being made in India and they are getting a fair deal and all that sort of thing.

ANNABEL: Oh yeah [Third World issues]. Always felt strongly the fact that so many of the people who are making things for our market are being paid a pittance in comparison to the middle men, and so I am all in favour of those sort of things and I think it is great news that they are doing these things. And not only that, but are encouraging people to continue with their own crafts rather than ditching them in favour of making stuff for us.

PAM: ... a lot of my environmentalist friends think [my lack of animal welfare ethics] is a weakness on my part, um, but I have tended to argue that my concern for the environment and my concern for my consumerism comes more from a desire to see people in Developing Countries have justice, than it does from animal rights and animal welfare considerations.

The idea of fairness, effectively the ethical virtue of justice, runs through all the accounts, whether it be in terms of a fair amount of money paid to the producer for the commodity bought, or the ability of people in Third World countries to maintain their own culture and fulfil their own needs without the intervention of the Western world through the consumer themselves. For all of the other issues at least some of the consumers had long, and personally emotive, stories to tell of the feelings involved with their ethical values. But the role of fair trade and Third World rights seemed to appear so obvious to the interviewees that little or no explanation of their personal relationship to Third World producers was forthcoming. Even Rachel who had been working on improving conditions in Third World factories, and had been out to investigate the "dire" conditions that people worked in, had little to say on her formulation of her fair trade values - and this even though she finds certain aspects of shopping almost impossible as the knowledge provided by her related job acts as an absolute barrier to buying non-fair trade marked goods.

My own feelings on the absence of alternative constructions of a fair trade ethic are that despite the espousal of foundationless moralities current in postmodern studies (see especially Bauman, 1992), the consumer has talked about fairness and justice because these are precisely the ethical codes which they have been

socialised into believing. Whilst justice may not be a cornerstone of capitalism, it is a philosophy central to Christian doctrines[7], national and international law, and can thus be viewed as one of the few universal ethics accepted on an everyday basis[8]. Fair trade is, therefore, relatively uncontentious as a consumer issue, and this allows for the somewhat dispassionate and self-evident explanation of their actions which the consumers have given. Furthermore, as the "other" involved in the ethical relationship is a human being, it becomes a simple matter for the consumer to relate to the plight of the producer. Even in the fairly unemotional descriptions of fair trade for justice shown above, there is evidence of an imaginary "other": one who has traditional crafts and scarcity of food.

When tracing the interviewees' constructions of their ethics, I started to follow the use of an imaginary other to see if all ethical constructions contained an element of "other", or whether it was possible to develop responsibility through a faceless ethical ideal. In examining the use of other in personal responsibility I have been influenced by Levinas' (1946) working of the moral relationship. Although Levinas' work adressed social relations in a sense of meeting the other face to face, he shows how we relate to the other not just by being able to see ourselves in the other and to empathise with that, but also how we recognise a responsibility to the other through the differences between us, differences in which I (could) sense my strength:

> "One is for the other what the Other is for oneself; there is no exceptional place for the subject. The Other is known through sympathy, as another (my) self, as the alter ego" (Levinas, 1946: 47).

> "But already, in the very heart of the relationship with the other that characterises our social life, alterity appears as a non reciprocal relationship - that is, as contrasting strongly with contemporaneousness. The Other as Other is not only as alter ego: the Other is what I myself am not. The Other is this not because of the Other's character or physiognomy, or psychology, but because of the

[7] Jo, Susy and Lesley directly related their fair trade ethics to religion. Cross tabulation of the questionnaire responses showed that the entry point for ethical consumerism was more likely to be fair trade than any other issue for those Christians who viewed themselves as religious/very religious.

[8] Despite the seemingly natural acceptance of a universal notion of justice amongst the ethical consumers, how much we should care about distant strangers is one of the few areas in which moral theorists have an interest in development issues. Smith argues for an extension of the ethics of care to incorporate distant others (Smith, 1998), whereas Etzioni suggests that it is human nature to care more about those close to us, and any moral argument that fails to accept this point is relatively untenable (Etzioni, 1997).

> Other's very alterity. The Other is, for example, the weak, the poor, 'The Widow and the orphan', whereas I am the rich or the powerful. It can be said that intersubjective space is not symmetrical" (Levinas, 1946: 48).

In sensing a sentient being in the other, and understanding their capacity to feel pain, and in being aware of the power that we hold over the other in our ability to afflict that pain, we come to take full responsibility for the other. This kind of asymmetrical reworking of Buber's I-Thou relationship (Levinas cited in Bauman, 1993: 113) fits with the impression that the consumers' narratives convey about their ideas of producers trapped into a system where the Western consumer (and through the consumer the retailer) holds the balance of power[9].

The notion that ethics, and ethical actions, are dependent upon an emotive sense of empathy is becoming more popular in contemporary moral theories, such as the ethics of care, or Soloman's (1997) belief in emotions being necessary for the construction of a sense of justice. Psychologists working with affective-cognitive theories similarly recognise that ethical action is dependent upon emotional motivations (Gauss, 1990, Mosiander, 1998:6), with perceptions of injustice being filled with the "hot cognition" of emotion (Gamson, 1995: 90)[10]. That fair trade was not talked about with the emotional clarity which characterised the comments about animal welfare and the environment is unlikely to be suggestive that the formation of a fair trade ethic is simply a dispassionate and intellectual exercise. Rather, I read this as justifying Stevenson's (1937: 496) theorisation of ethics as having emotive meanings which seek to influence. In other words, emotive ethical

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[9] Interestingly, whilst ethical responsibility is deemed to be premised upon asymmetrical power relations, the huge disparity in perceptions of First World:Third World power relations has started to concern aid agencies sensitive to the feelings of Third World citizens. Save the Children published a set of guidelines for awareness raising and money raising publicity, which explicitly states that images that portray the developing world as weak and dependent upon a "paternalistic" developed world must not be used.

[10] Jasper claims that studies of protesters have been reluctant to examine the role of emotions as they are still viewed as non-rational and "women's work" (Jasper, 1998: 397-419). Whereas theories relating to crowd behaviour have tended to give emotions a central role, protest theories have concentrated upon organisation for rational objectives. However, Jasper argues that rather than being contrary to rationality emotions are dependent upon cognitive understanding (ibid: 401). Harré et al (1986) suggest that emotions are in part socially constructed and closely linked to ethical values. Emotions such as anger are therefore the outcome of cognitively perceived infringements of ethical beliefs. It is from this position that I include emotional discourses into a discussion on rationalising behaviour. I suggest that when holding contentious ethics, especially those surrounded by uncertainty, it is acting to ameliorate uncomfortable emotions which makes ethical consumerism personally rational - far more so than action based on logically prescribed, but abstract ethics.

statements have rhetorical elements, which are used to persuade the auditor of the validity of the ethic. The relative lack of emotive sentiment in the narratives of fair trade therefore underlines the comparatively uncontentious nature of the ethic for the ethical consumer.

Whilst the belief in fair trade was expressed through an ethic of justice, the interviewees talked regularly about individual purchases of fair trade goods in terms of supporting the producer. "Support" was a word often used for all the issue areas. Indeed the whole notion of ethical consumerism is premised upon supporting companies one likes and avoiding those one does not. However, the particular pattern of strategies of support employed for fair trade products, or more usually fair trade coffee, deepens my suspicion that it is going to be difficult for fair trade effectively to position itself as a product of choice, as opposed to an extension of Third World charity giving:

> MARY: [The coffee] is *Cafe Direct*, the fair trade, the Oxfam one. I first started drinking it because I was working for [a related charity]. Um, it's not organic. It's fair trade. I didn't really drink coffee before that. I just started drinking it because I thought "Oh it's fair trade and I'll drink it anyway". So I buy it on principle, sort of to promote it anyway, 'cos I think it's good to sort of promote stuff like that.
>
> SUSY: I tend to follow campaigns a hell of a lot. Like when they introduce, when something new gets a fair trade mark [right]. Like when *Percol* coffee got its fair trade mark I went out and bought some *Percol*, rather than *Cafe Direct* just to sort of add my consumer power. What else, if anything gets the fair trade mark I tend to just go out and buy it because it has got the fair trade mark.

Susy was one of the four interviewees deeply involved with fair trade, both through campaigning and in their consumer choices. The pattern of purchasing multiple fair trade products displayed by these consumers was not replicated across the whole sample, with most of the consumers having fair trade coffee as their token fair trade gesture. This is not to suggest that it is not possible to market fair trade goods as an effective strategy. But it is to say that at present it is a widely acclaimed campaign, that has failed to deliver to willing consumers the products which they would purchase and consume. At the moment coffee appears to represent the only credible fair trade product area, but there are only so many coffee producers the ethical consumer can realistically make a financial commitment to. As the consumers held a clear sense of agency, with their

comments about fair trade suffused with notions of happier workers and indigenous people being able to maintain their traditions, alongside an implicit trust in the fair trade mark, this failure due to an unwitting construction of fair trade as charity giving is particularly telling.

The relationship to charity giving is partly due to the closeness of the relationship between the provision of fair trade products and charity shops: Lisa explained the lack of fair trade products in her house as being due to the fact that she could not get used to going to Oxfam when she needed to buy jam. However, mostly it appeared to be an extension of the very ideology underlying the consumer's actions. Rather than viewing fair trade as an extension of a hard-line Marxist philosophy to prove that there are other economic strategies, as conceived by the original fair traders, the interviewees said little about politics. Whilst Annabel felt that we would be better off if capitalism fell, Pam was sceptical of her husband's Marxist thinking and Jane stated that none of her actions had a political basis. For the majority of the consumers this was a personal relationship between them and the producer. If it fitted into any larger pattern of behaviour other than a philosophy of ethical consumerism, then it was an extension of charity work, campaigning for debt relief or sponsoring children in the Third World. In the absence of an over-riding ideology, agency to improve the plight of the Third World becomes confused with the ability to assuage conscience through "support" in the same way that one would give a donation. The absolute commitment to fair trade has a long way to go before it reaches the levels of commitment to animal welfare shown by some of the consumers.

Animal Welfare

Whilst the discourses may be well practiced for the espousal of justice through fair trade, animal welfare issues generate far more emotive language in order to stress the consumer's moral responsibility to animals. Plous (1993: 14) offers a series of psychological measures used to dissociate the consumer from pain inflicted on animals in production. Traditionally, in ethical relationships to animals differences become emphasised and animals are viewed as feeling less pain, having no self-awareness or little intelligence[11] (Plous, 1993: 28). Children become socialised into seeing only certain animals as worthy of affection, and farm animals then become

[11] Plous goes on to show how these same methods were at one time used in order to validate slavery.

separated from pets in terms of "proper treatment", with people legally being prosecuted for treating a dog in the way they would treat a pig. Animals as food are distanciated from live animals by the terminology employed, which mostly offers a different name to meat from the animal. In counteracting these processes of ethical socialisation, the ethical consumers concerned with animal welfare processes made continual references to their perception of different types of animals as equals, at least to themselves if not to humans. This understanding is expressed by Singer in his theorisation of speciesism (Singer, 1976). Live animals become "beautiful", whereas as meat becomes "dead pig" or carcass. Lizzie mentions nearly all of the psychological factors listed above when she describes her vegetarian ethical constructions:

> LIZZIE: I've always, ever since I was a child I've always hated animals being killed [right]. Whenever my grandmother used to talk about hunting it used to really upset me. I've always had a real affinity with animals, we always had dogs that I adored and to me eating a pig is the same as eating your own dog, and I've felt that ever. I used to like the taste as a child, but then as soon as I got to the age of about 9 or 10, even though I've always known meat comes from animals you don't really think about it, it was actually when I was thinking that this is animal flesh that I couldn't eat it, and I've never wanted it again.
>
> ME: Do you then see, because obviously most people think there are humans and there are animals, do you not have that?
>
> LIZZIE: No, I don't and I think that is where the difference always arose. As a child I never understood and I remember going to church when I was younger and learning that animals have no soul and I used to just cry and cry. Because we had this dog Hector, who I really loved, and when he died I wanted him to go to heaven, I wanted to see him again, and when I was a teenager, when I was 13 for my thirteenth birthday I got a puppy, and she was just my life, for 11 years until she died. It was just heart-breaking when she died and the thought that she is any different, especially when you have had animals around you as a child, you related to them so strongly. And you do know what they are thinking, and they know what you are thinking, and it was just the thought that anyone could just relate that differently.

In contrast to the relatively dispassionate explanation of the justice of fair trade, the vegetarians and vegans expressed their animal welfare ethics in personal terms, through their love for animals and the "heart-break" they feel when animals are abused. The interviewees recognised that they differ from the rest of society in their views of the rights of animals, and felt compelled to explain their differences as a very real belief, which has emotive impact upon the self. Indeed, for animal

welfare, more so than for any other issue, the information used in deciding upon a moral responsibility to animals was capable of being derived from personal sources rather than highly mediated sources. Once again in these formulations the consumer has a clear image in her mind of the "other", and some construction of their relationship, as a consumer, to the other's pain:

> LESLEY: ... if we are cooking, I don't normally put an egg in it at all. I don't like the idea of, well I really love otters and when we went to the otter sanctuary I saw all the otters being fed by these day old chicks, and I mean I suppose it hadn't really, I hadn't really thought that obviously if you are having, if you have chickens, like if you have got cows, obviously all the time you are not going to have female cattle. All the time you are not going to have female chicks being born. So all these day old chicks were being fed to the otters, so ever since then I haven't liked the idea of eating eggs.

Interestingly, it is nearly always the same animals (imaginary others) that are mentioned in the interviewees' narratives: chickens, both laying and broiler; veal calves; and milking cows. A clear relationship between consumer and animal is constructed, offering the agency to take moral responsibility. The rest of the animal kingdom then becomes included in an ethic of non-killing, non-exploiting or non-pain inflicting. So whereas the vegetarian may not eat chicken for cruelty reasons, not eating sheep could be seen as following an ethic, rather than having a connection to a particular set of undesirable practices. However, for the majority of the ethical consumers, reducing the differences between animals, and between animals and humans was generally not the same as believing that animals are equal to humans. This meant that whilst a few of the interviewees believed that it was morally wrong to kill an animal, most felt that the essential factor was treatment of the animal. The issue then becomes about ameliorating the unnecessary suffering of animals:

> CHERRY: The animal product issue to me is about animal rights predominantly, I don't have a problem with eating meat, I don't have a problem with the use of dairy products. If I lived in an ideal world, I'd probably have a herd of something, but the fact that you know that cows spend forty hours a week wired up to machines I find absolutely barbaric.

What constitutes "unnecessary" suffering remains a debatable point, and the view expressed by Cherry was certainly not replicated across the rest of the

interviewees. Yet, the belief that animals had a right not to suffer "unnecessarily" appeared to be the one aspect of animal welfare upon which all the interviewees broadly agreed.

The actions common to the consumers that related to the ethic of animal welfare were those which had been promoted by long-term and high profile campaigns. What appeared was a pattern of culturally specific, minimalistic notions of unnecessary suffering - cosmetic testing[12], fur and free-range eggs, where only eggs bought in packets counted, those in processed food were exempt from consumer responsibility. Once again, the social acceptability of the ethic meant that in general no explanation was given of the consumer's thinking:

> SUSY: ... whenever I get that free-range eggs or non free-range eggs, there is such a huge price difference and I always think "do I get the food or not?", but yeah I think of the battery hen, but what would I prefer and yeah, then I would prefer the free-range eggs to be promoted more, so yeah, that is the bottom, that is when I sense the connection, when I didn't get the cheapest.
> |
> ME: Do you buy things with eggs in, say you were eating out or something, would you buy food with eggs in, like omelettes and stuff?
> |
> SUSY: Yes, I would and I never usually ask whether they are free-range.

The decision as to the most appropriate animal welfare behaviour is far more complicated than that relating to fair trade. The animal welfare ethic was not as clearly constructed as justice for the Third World, and the possible forms of consumer action are more wide ranging. Having reduced the differences between animals and humans to a minimum, and accepted responsibility for the treatment of animals in production techniques, it is necessary to decide where one draws the line under acceptable practices. For Jane, a vegan, there is an easy answer: having been a vegetarian, she became convinced that veganism was more in-keeping with her ethical beliefs. A vegan now for 7 years, she has no uncertainties about it being the correct way to act:

> JANE: ... as far as I see it being an ethical consumer is being vegan, or being vegan is the only way of being an ethical consumer.
> |
> ME: Was that a difficult choice, to bring up the kids [to be vegan]?

[12] The interviews pre-dated the European ruling to ban cosmetic testing on animals.

|
JANE: No, no, no, no. Because I believe so strongly in it, there just wasn't any alternative. I just wouldn't have dreamt about giving them those things.

For other interviewees, the correct consumer behaviour was harder to decide, with some individuals being all too aware that it is difficult to construct a rational cut off point in animal welfare concerns in a society which prosecutes people for their treatment of dogs, but boils other animals alive. Lizzie, with her egalitarian attitudes towards animals, explains how she has reflexively negotiated the "correct" actions from her beliefs and her needs. She is not content with her practices, and would like to have the strength to do more, and yet is aware that she has to think of herself at some point in the equation. Susy echoed this in her interviews:

LIZZIE: I think you can go too far, something like Jainism or Buddhism, where you won't drink the water unless it has been strained in case you kill bugs, that kind of thing.

LIZZIE: I keep going through stages of trying to give up dairy products. Also, and I think that this is the difficult thing, I think my body really craves, since I had my wisdom teeth out I started drinking milk at my parent's which I haven't done for ages ... suddenly I really needed it, and I started doing it without thinking about it, but I think it is more of a physical craving than anything else.

SUSY: Then I went through a period of trying to be a vegan for about three weeks, but that didn't work.
|
ME: Did it not work because it was too boring or too hard or too unhealthy?
|
SUSY: Um, oh, I suppose it was because I thought I was doing enough, it was too much. I felt like I was doing my bit, basically it was because I was too lazy. If I had tried a bit harder I know I would have been okay. I would have found it interesting. You develop the taste for things and there are alternatives, there are soya milks and there's vegan desserts and things, etc. etc. It wasn't anything in particular that stopped me from being vegan. You know when people say I can't do without cheese or whatever, I know I could. It was very easy, I could easily you know just stop eating things and go on to something else, develop tastes for them. But I wasn't, I was being lazy and wasn't prepared to do it [hmmm]. And again it is so difficult to know when to stop, because once you are vegan there is a temptation to be macrobiotic [yeah] is it macrobiotic when you take everything from the local area? So then you are looking for soya products from your local area, er very difficult, I would be living off turnips for the rest of my life [both laugh]. So I am well grounded in the issues up to vegetarianism and with a bit of effort I know I could go further, but I wasn't prepared to do it.

It seems likely that the decision about desirable and yet ethical action preceded the rationalisation of the action, which is why I stress that behaviour is always the consequence of negotiation. The consumer has balanced the needs and desires of the self against that of the "other" and come to a pattern of action which is bearable in its restrictions. Narratives of stated beliefs and limits to ethical behaviour are then constructed to fit in with how the consumer wishes to act. Moreover, both Lizzie and Susy reveal themselves to be acting upon some sort of normalised set of practices rather than upon the ethics they narrated. Their belief in animal rights, whilst expressed as a system of reducing animal exploitation or equality to humans, is being acted out through a vegetarian ethic, that is one which is primarily concerned with the use of products from slaughtered animals. Vegetarianism has become an acceptable benchmark action for animal welfare. I suggest that many of the interviewees who were vegetarian had ethics more in-keeping with organic farming or veganism, than vegetarianism. That they have a stated difference between their beliefs and their actions, although they justify it through limits to ethical behaviour, is likely to be due to the cultural acceptability of vegetarianism.

The vegetarian and vegan ethics are extremely efficient in determining consistent actions. The ethics have strong efficacy for two inter-linked reasons. The first is that by adopting a pattern of behaviour which has clear guidelines, such as not eating any product produced from a dead animal, or any product which has animal derivations, the consumer no longer requires any information about systems of production, purely information about ingredients. There is, therefore, a much reduced issue of trust, and no need to continue to feel any connection to an animal in order to provoke a response. Indeed Jane, a vegan, denies feeling an ethical connection to animals anymore as her behaviour has become subject to habituation:

> JANE: It is just so ingrained now I don't even think of the other products. I don't even look at them. I don't really think of the connection at all now when I am buying them. It is just a lifestyle that I am used to now. I don't even think about it.

This habituation, in which animal ethics effectively become an embodied knowledge, ensures that in order to eat meat the vegan would have to consciously re-negotiate her ethical positioning. Thus any ethic which becomes an absolute,

such as "no eggs ever" is far more effective than an ethic which says "only free-range eggs, if they are available". The absolute nature of veganism and vegetarianism is especially effective due to the expression of this ethic as an identity statement, which forms the second strand of efficacy. As vegetarianism and veganism are used as informers of consumption practices, "Sorry, I can't eat that I am a vegetarian", and as food is such a visible area of consumption, these "identity ethics" are subject to surveillance from others. The culturally understood behavioural patterns determined by vegetarianism and veganism, along with the contentious nature of the actions themselves, mean that more than for any other area of ethical consumerism, vegan and vegetarian actions demand and display consistency. I will return to this point several times in Chapter Five.

I have one final point to make about animal welfare ethics which resonates with other areas of ethical concern: there are thresholds which limit "appropriate" behaviours. The ethical consumers were remarkably clear about the boundaries to consumer actions. Actions arising from animal welfare ethics were viewed as being applicable only to the consumers themselves. Even the vegans claimed that they would buy certain animal products for other people if it was really important, and Annabel, whose whole family was vegetarian said that if visitors wanted meat cooked then she would cook it. There was a strong feeling amongst the consumers that it was not morally correct to impose your ethics on anybody else. Mary told me about being wary of talking about her veganism to the children she looked after; Susy talks about the limits to discussing ethical consumerism with conventional consumers, drawing the line at saying anything which would make them feel bad:

> ME: You told me last week about the child you were minding, and you didn't want to say that you were vegan to him.
>
> MARY: No, I'd tell him that I don't eat meat and stuff, but if he asked me why um, I just said I don't like eating meat. I didn't want to get into the big animal welfare thing in case his mother thought I was indoctrinating him.
>
> SUSY: If it made people feel guilty or feel forced into buying something then I wouldn't do it. So if I was eating a veggie meal and someone was eating a huge steak I would try and be as nice as possible so that they wouldn't feel too guilty about eating a great big, fat steak, see what I mean? Basically that is my boundary. I don't like to make people feel guilt.

Furthermore, despite figures which suggest that a third of all young people have been involved in some form of animal rights protest (Bowcott and Harding, 1998), none of the consumers I interviewed had attended any related demonstrations or protests. Whilst writing to companies, speaking to supermarket managers, attending conferences and volunteering were commonly mentioned, none of the consumers that argued for a more publicly political set of animal welfare practices. Only Jane viewed herself as belonging to a broader animal rights movement - often refering to vegans as a collective "we". Whilst Jane may then be practicing veganism through some sense of identity with a social movement, it seems that Lisa speaks for the rest of the animal welfare consumers when she says that she is performing "personal" politics. Several of the consumers openly confess to not being willing or able to commit extravagant acts of protest. It is apparent that the animal welfare actions involved in ethical consumerism are mainly political in the personal sense. If the interviewees are part of a social movement, then in general it is through individual actions as part of what Gamson (1995: 101) would call an "aggregate frame" rather than a cohesive collective action frame[13].

Environmental concerns

Environmental narratives differ substantially from the narratives of fair trade and animal welfare. When asked about information sources and issue concerns it was the environment that dominated the interviewees' discourses. This is not, however, to say that the environment was perceived as the most important issue by all the consumers. I shall use this section to suggest that the emphasis on the environment occurs because it is the issue most surrounded by uncertainty; most dependent upon expert systems and trust; and requiring the greatest amount of rationalisation for the consumer to establish a position of responsibility and agency. The ethical consumer's emphasis on the environment is matched by theoretical interest. Whilst psychologists and sociologists appear to have little interest in the development of fair trade and animal welfare concerns, the environment has a

[13] This position was repeated across the questionnaire sample. Whilst 91% of the ethical consumers belonged to a pressure group or ethical NGO, only 27% had been involved in demonstrations in the previous year. So whilst ethical consumerism may be used to complement activism, as in the case of Cherry, for the most part it would appear that it is being used as an alternative to protests. There is no one defined relationship between ethical consumerism and the wider political activities of a social movement. See Jamison (1996), and Johnstone and Klandermas (1995) for a more complete overview of social movements.

plethora of studies across all areas (see, for example Gardner and Stern (1996), Finger (1994), De Young (1996), Wynne (1996)).

The role of mediating parties in developing environmental concern is well documented, and it is not just the expert knowledge of the scientists, but also the environmental lobbyists and the media who determine what enters the public domain as an issue (Burgess, 1990, Irwin, 1995):

> "It is not sufficient that facts and concepts are created by scientists in relation to 'natural' phenomena; global environmental problems also require intermediary actors with the ability to translate the calculations, simulations and projections of the oceanographers, biochemists and meteorologists into issues of public concern." (Jamison, 1996: 224)

As Michael (1998: 317) points out, the information the ethical consumer receives from these expert sources is not independent: "Scientific knowledge is always mediated - it never appears in some abstracted, value-free, purely "cognitive" form". For the environment more than any other issue area, many of the concerns highlighted by experts are subject to uncertainty, and have equally high-profile opposition from other experts. It is not possible for the individual to hold independent knowledge about which of the experts is correct in risk issues such as global warming and genetically modified food. Action for the environment is, therefore, dependent upon trusting certain expert knowledges. McDonnell goes further to suggest that trust is the key to environmental action:

> "... the primary ingredients of the societal management of risk and uncertainty in everyday life, and in particular in the conduct of environmental initiatives, turns out to be, not knowledge and rational choice, but trust and experiential judgement. This is never so complete that trust is not necessary - indeed, trust is a presupposition of all socially produced knowledge: in the ordinary course of events, rational choice is accomplished only on the basis of what are finally moral and prudential judgements as to the appropriateness of private and public trust." (McDonell, 1997: 833)

The ethical consumers were quite certain about who they did and did not trust to inform them about environmental issues and actions, and the processes involved in creating that trust are clearly narrated by the interviewees:

> MARY: I mean if they are from the Ministry of Agriculture then I don't believe anything they say [right]. I don't know the scientists, if they are from a group that are interested in promoting the environment and

> nothing else [right] then I'll believe them, but not if it's like big companies that are just saying "oh, yeah we have an environmentally friendly policy" [right] and they are just saying it for lip service sort of thing.
>
> PAM: Oh, well I mean I am very sceptical about a lot of what appears to be objective information about food, and it is actually coming from some organisation involved with food, and when you actually look at it it turns out that it has mostly multinationals on the board
>
> JO: I have been persuaded by groups who have done their homework, whatever the allegations made or whatever accusations made, they are always, they have been supported by observations by scientific study and things have been investigated by the water industries and the pollution of rivers and so on, they don't just say "well it's happening" they have it all tested and they have the proof, and that is what has impressed me terribly about Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth, because their research is so thorough and people who work for them, you know, are so well qualified and so dedicated and take such risks to let people know what the truth is.

At work in the process of the personal construction of trust are two recognisable factors. First, the assumption of objectivity. All the interviewees were sceptical about any source of information that they perceived as profiting from that information. This concurs with Myers and Macnaghten's (1998: 349) work with focus groups. Hence, the government was viewed as likely to give out misleading information to avoid putting into place any commercially damaging regulations. Information provided by transnational corporations was seen as untrustworthy, as the company was perceived as holding profit motives for adopting a green image. It follows therefore, that environmental groups and consumer magazines, with no directly related financial gain, were the most trusted source of information. However, this is not to suggest that any not-for-profit organisation would be subject to the same level of trust. The consumer has to respect the organisation providing the information (Restorick, 1999). Jo gives a concise explanation of her reasons for respecting Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace - perceiving them as highly efficient at scientifically determining the information they disseminate. Thus Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and WWF were frequently mentioned by the interviewees, but more radical groups such as Earth First! were not. Second, as I suggested in Chapter Three, knowledge does not necessarily relate to action, and there are schools of thought which suggest that who and what the consumer trusts is often determined by the actions such a belief would necessitate (Ungar, 1994). For issues which are surrounded by uncertainty, the individual can quite easily

convince themselves that the most appropriate sources to trust are those who advocate actions the consumer wishes to undertake (Lidskog, 1996). As the ethical consumers were keen to undertake environmental action, those groups producing information which necessitates action are the most likely to be trusted. This trust therefore, carries with it an element of advocacy (Billig, 1991) and information in-keeping with the ethical consumer's own values can be used as evidence of the rational nature of the consumers actions.

One outcome of the stronger trust relationship with environmental groups was that echoes of environmental campaigns resonated in the consumers' explanations of their ethics. These campaign discourses were indistinguishable from knowledge sources and appropriate action, as though the knowledge of the issue, the ethical value and the necessary action had been presented to the consumer as a whole package. Unlike animal welfare, the correct consumer behaviour was then determined simultaneously with the ethic or value, rather than as a personal decision stemming from the ethic. This is not surprising considering the necessity of expert knowledge for devising appropriate environmental concern and action - rainforest destruction, global warming, water pollution and the loss of biodiversity were all mentioned alongside the actions to be taken to ameliorate the impacts. All the interviewees' transcripts revealed traces of particular campaigns:

> JO: ... with the meat, the fact that the forests are cut down, slash and burn, in order to just move on. You know the soil is exhausted and then they move on and burn another bit of forest. Erm, but then in South America it is the ranching that has become a bit of a scandal, or has been for some time. They you know, just so that more *McDonalds* can open up all over the world, you know Peking, and er, I don't know if there is a country, Moscow I remember there was a great to do when the first *MacDonalds* opened in Moscow, and this was such a treat for them. So I never patronise places like that.

The consumers acted on a variety of these "system ethic-actions", with personally constructed actions being a rarity. Products concerned with low Food Miles, organic produce, *Ecover*, and recycled products accounted for the majority of these consumer actions. However, purchases fitted in with larger consumption practices, such as recycling, using public transport, and energy conservation. This is not to suggest that system ethic-actions do not have personal meaning for the consumer, and once again even for obviously high-profile environmental campaigns, the

interviewees talked about the environment in emotive terms. Hence, the consumer removes the ethic-action from an abstract public discourse to being a rational personal action in order to quieten personally distressing concerns:

> LIZZIE: I find when I think about the enormity of what people are doing to the planet, you know the CFC fridges and that sort of thing, and just how many plastic bags people throw away, and stuff like that and it's just astounding and it frightens me.
>
> JO: A lot of wildlife, not just, but yes, the large animals because of the ivory poaching and the poachers and what they have done, and that is so, so wicked it just makes me turn over inside to think about it.
>
> MARY: I don't see any reason to cut down a tree to have to wipe your bum. It's so silly. Especially that soft one with those cute puppies they use to advertise it. You know it's really fibrous and you could be using a whole tree or a sapling to wipe your bum, and there's just no way you should do that.

Environmentalists have begun to deconstruct our relationship to the environment to imply that we neither have a single construction of nature (Macnaghten and Urry, 1998) or a single way of talking about the environment as "other" (Michael and Grove-White, 1993). Depending upon the construction of the ethic-action the consumer is left negotiating a series of relational positions to the environment as an "other". Once again reworking Buber's (1923) theory Michael and Grove-White show that the relationship of the individual to the environment can be viewed as alternately: an *I-Thou* position (where there is a clear image of a sentient being, e.g. big game animals); an *I-It* relationship through responsibility over the destruction of nature (where nature is viewed as disempowered, e.g. rainforest depletion); a *Me-It* position such as risk perceptions (e.g. global warming); and even a *Me-Thou* position from the belief in some form of a karmic risk (where nature has greater importance and power than humans[14]) (Michael and Grove-White, 1993: 37). This means that personal responsibility has been constructed variously as having a connection to a sentient other, a responsibility to the planet, and even a responsibility to the self through perceptions of risk, karmic or otherwise[15].

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[14] Several of the interviewees explained their environmental concerns through notions of spirituality and holism, whereby the individual is not separate from the environment, and thereby inevitably subject to environmental impacts.

[15] NGOs and retailers find that consumers tend to be indifferent to environmental campaigns unless there is an obvious relationship between action and outcome (Bedford, forthcoming). If there is a clear risk to the self, or an impact on an identifiable animal, then campaigns

Without the clear relationship to a producer/produced resultant from the I-Thou positioning of animal welfare and fair trade, the uncertainty of environmental issues becomes increased. Unlike Eden's (1995) research findings, the ethical consumers in my study had difficulty in appreciating the efficacy of their own actions for global environmental concerns. In general highly optimistic, this was the one area where the interviewees expressed anxiety about the potential of the consumer, especially in the short-term. Lizzie explained how she viewed the ethical consumer as having power, using South Africa and the change in animal welfare practices as examples. This feeling of efficacy was not replicated for the environment however:

> LIZZIE: Sometimes I think anything we do won't make much difference and I start getting really depressed [right]. And then I phone someone and say, you know, I can't make any difference.

Rather than offering a sense of efficacy to the ethical consumer, I contend that ethics-actions allow the consumer a sense of agency, without any guarantee it will make a difference. The interviewees made frequent references to "doing something", undoubtedly believing that however ineffective doing something was better than doing nothing:

> JO: The earth's climate is changing, so what do you do about it? You don't just sit back!

Unlike Macnaghten and Urry (1998:1) I do not believe that these different representations of nature mean that the consumer has no concept of the environment as a "real entity". Each consumer had a selection of ethics-actions, which they accepted uncontentiously under an umbrella of environmental concern. At no time did the interviewees appear to find the different ethics, or the shift between self concern, animal concern and aesthetic love of nature, problematic. Instead, many of the consumers obviously held unifying constructions of either the root of environmental problems or the environment itself. The two main formulations which were mentioned, sometimes interwoven, were a notion of waste and over-consumption stemming from hypermodernisation, and a vision of the planet as a complex organic system or Mother Earth:

> CATH: I just hate waste.

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tend to be successful. This suggests that the I-Thou, and Me-It are in general the most effective ethical relationships.

JO: It is all inter-linked you know and it all leads to this question of global warming and the race in technology and what they call modernisation. The old ways are lost ... just because of the rush to involve mass production of goods and that is to satisfy er, manufacturers who just think in terms of profits and it has become a very, very greedy world. And I abhor that so I am glad that there are still some people who are happy to hang on to simpler ways.

CHERRY: It's like we live on this really beautiful and amazing planet, and not only does it sustain us, provides us with food, you know, surely it's natural, well for me it's just natural to wanna pay my respects to it and not treat it like a toilet basically, which is what we do. So I guess that for me, you know, if you were going to look at the human race as a whole we'd be in our adolescence at the moment [right]. We'd be kicking up loads of shit and acting like immature, you know, a large immature sort of a child. The human race is one big hormonal mess at the moment and can't even seem to set out how we're supposed, you know what I mean? [yeah]. You know when you're about 15 and you treat your mother like shit for about two years or so and that's where we are and hopefully we'll kick out of it soon.

The construction of the environmental issue as over-consumption was the only time that ethical consumerism came into strong contention with neo-liberal capitalism. Indeed two of the ethical consumers, Julie and Rachel, had "down-shifted" - that is switched to a lower level of consumption. However, it was only through the environmental protests of Cherry and Jo, who sometimes joined her daughter on a road protest site, that there was a suggestion that ethical consumerism had any relationship to a political project outside of the self.

Negotiating correct ethical actions

The ethical consumers had to negotiate their ideal of correct ethical behaviour across all three issue areas, as well as other areas not examined by me. What was clear is that not all of the ethical areas had the same level of commitment or emotional attachment. In the few areas where two consumer ethics clashed, the consumer usually knew which ethic would command their greater commitment. This is shown in the two examples below. Mary is a vegan, but she is also heavily involved in environmental groups, and has worked with agencies involved in fair trade, whilst Susy was introduced to fair trade at an early age by her family:

MARY: If it was organic but it had animal stuff in it then I would go for the animal free stuff... I'd be more likely to buy organic [than fair trade] ... just because of pesticides and stuff. Not for health reasons, but just for more environmental reasons.

> SUSY: .. conflict? If it was a choice between, well yes, but if that is the case I have to admit that I usually go by the price. If it is a question of, if they are both ethical and one is organic and one is fair trade, um, I would go by the price I suppose. Those are my boundaries, they would have to be ethical in some ways, or how I am feeling at the time I suppose, because I might decide that the fair trade issue is more important at the moment because they have a new brand out, badabadabada [um], but actually I do actually think that the fair trade ultimately wins out. I think I am more inclined to go for the fair trade than for organic or for the healthy one.

Mary quite easily chose which ethic held precedence (in her terminology "was closer to her"). Although Susy does actually choose one ethic over the other, it is hardly what one could call clear cut. Pam, who has been involved in ethical consumer issues for longer than any of the other interviewees, recognises the problems in deciding on appropriate behaviour across a variety of issues. She has written down a set of what she calls "preferences" when trying to choose what she buys, such as buying local produce and buying products as far down the food chain as possible - feeling herself that animal welfare is the least important aspect of ethical consumption. What appears is a picture of every ethical consumer holding a very individual set of consumer priorities, and therefore, an individual set of idealised consumer practices.

Pam points out that it is impossible to follow your priorities or preferences at all times, and it is therefore impossible to have any definitive behavioural rules. Other ethical consumers obviously agree with this sentiment, as the products that consumers saw themselves as being absolutely unable to buy were very few and far between - and of those mentioned the ones that the consumers <u>really did not</u> buy were even more scarce. Totally unacceptable behaviours are usually those involved with animal welfare: the vegans would never touch any animal product; the vegetarians would never eat meat. Other absolute "taboos" were related to certain companies who have reputations which preclude any self-respecting ethical consumer from buying their products: namely *Nestlé* and *McDonalds*. These two companies were almost universally boycotted across all ethical consumers, at least in principle, and formed part of the select groups of what I have called "absolutes": that is behaviour that can never be performed with a reasonable defence. The consumer, similarly, has a set of "thresholds" which release the individual from obligation to follow through their ethics - as shown by the consumers' willingness to

purchase animal products for friends. Thresholds and the justifications for thresholds will be discussed in the next chapter.

To summarise, I have argued in this section decisions about appropriate actions need to be based on the consumer's ethical values. For some issues these actions have certain coded behaviours already ascribed to them. Other issues have patterns of behaviour which have become accepted as normal with regard to an ethic. The consumer generally balances these behaviours with their own needs and desires, so that everyone has an individualised set of purchasing practices which remains a negotiation between the socialised, personal beliefs and personal needs. This falls out as rationalisations based on priorities, thresholds and absolutes, which are the consumer's own system for ethical consumerism.

Rationalising an ethical position

During the interviews, the ethical consumers did not just rationalise their ethics through the use of appropriate knowledges and structures of ethical action, they positioned their actions against other people's. This is the final strand in constructing a rational ethical position, and necessitates an explanation of why the consumer does not do either more or less about their ethical concerns. Kate Burningham (1995) used discourse analysis to trace through the language employed by opponents in an environmental dispute to position themselves and others. She has followed through a theory derived from Gilbert and Mulkey's (1984) work:

> "Gilbert and Mulkay write that [the scientists'] accounts have an asymmetrical structure: speakers employ an empiricist repertoire to account for their own position, and a contingent one to account for the positions of others. In the empiricist repertoire scientists characterise their actions and beliefs as following unproblematically from the empirical facts, while in the contingent repertoire actions and beliefs are accounted for in terms of factors such as personal characteristics, social ties or group membership."

> "In the data collected during my research into the impacts of road schemes a similar pattern is apparent. Speakers attribute the 'wrong' positions of others as the result of 'putting their head in the sand', not listening to facts', 'not understanding' and personal interest, while their own position is characterised as 'facing up to facts', objective, based on common-sense and 'rational appraisals' of expert advice and information. Clearly ordinary people rely on empiricist repertoires to

> bolster their case, and contingent repertoires to undermine the position of others, just as much as scientists do" (Burningham, 1995: 99).

I have already used the example of Julie to show how she has used knowledge and ethical constructs to present herself as rational, and her positioning of self against others follows the pattern shown by Burningham above:

> JULIE: ...and so one of the things again that I have come up with is when you go to meetings about things you get people who say "you environmentalists, you are such idealists". You are telling them that there is a problem, they are saying to you that if they ignore it they think it might go away, now who is being hopelessly idealistic?

And as an almost identical statement of alternative positions:

> RACHEL: ... and a friend said to me "technology will save us" and I think "What? Where is that coming from?" and yet these are like acquaintances or people in Peter's choir or something like that, so it could be anybody really, but I just think "how can they believe that?". How can they actually believe that technology can save us when all the evidence suggests that resources are running out and the walls of the sun are closing in. And it was quite a shock to me actually, that people actually believe that and I have to take it on board that people have that way of thinking, but it is quite hard for me to comprehend. Almost as though they are blind and closed down with the real world.

However, in contrast to the opponents in Burningham's environmental dispute, most of the ethical consumers showed an understanding, although at times patronising, of the conventional consumer's reasons for not indulging in ethical consumerism. Mary shows a brief animosity towards her employer, but in general has a sympathetic grasp of the barriers to ethical consumerism. Cherry, in her inimitable fashion, manages to relate to the conventional consumer before condemning them to the subjugation waiting for the average, systemised member of our society:

> CHERRY: Not everybody can afford to do that or has got the time to do that, so that's a good reason why most people don't ethically consume. And people are subjected to crap advertisement about the importance of having white teeth, and drinking *Coca-Cola*. Even if you're totally aware of the fact that advertisement's a shit, the fact that people spend billions of pounds every year on them must mean that they work you know [right]. It's so difficult not to be sucked into the shit: "I've got to drive a car, and I've gotta own a big house, I've gotta have a washing machine and a dishwasher, therefore I am" sorta philosophy.

ME: Right, why do you think it is that people who can afford to buy ethical goods, why do you think they don't?

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MARY: What people who can afford it? Just laziness. It's like this woman that I baby-sit for, she really annoys me. She goes on about the environment all the time. She's got her "I love my humpback whale" sticker on her car [right]. You know she's got three kids and I think anyone should be interested in that sort of stuff, like, especially if you've got kids, you've got to think about the future. And, er, she's totally into her car and she'll drive her kids to something that is five minutes away. I think it's just selfishness and laziness [right] .. and erm, some people just not being bothered or mean. I'm sure, maybe, and I think supermarkets don't have a lot of, I mean I think people are cynical of like green own brands in supermarkets [um]. Especially now, when every supermarket has got those economy own brands which are like, you know, 7p for whatever. Lots of different reasons instead of just one .. The amount of choice you can get for normal products as opposed to, you might get one green product in about, out of twenty washing up liquids say, people haven't got a choice.

The majority of the interviewees believed that not everybody had the ability, and therefore the duty, to consume ethically. Those presumed to have understandable reasons not to consume ethically, such as poverty or lack of time and knowledge, are not positioned with a contingent repertoire as described by Burningham. It is those who could do differently, but have simply chosen not to consume ethically who attract this asymmetrical evaluation. In other words, it is those who make the consumer feel like they have to defend their position in opposition to another that produce the harsher positioning. Indeed it is those who hold an apparently higher ethical position than the consumer draw the real disparagement:

ME: So you've got a partner [yeah], is he..?

|

CHERRY: He's a devoted, strict, puritanical vegan ... Before I met Doug I was a lot more dogmatic about my ethical consumption than I am now, and going out with such a dogmatist has made me feel so like "fuck off". He's too serious. I suppose it is the rebellious side of me.

JANE: I mean I do react if I eat something by accident. I do feel sick and I do react [right] ... But it doesn't bother me ethically, whereas April's dad gets tremendously upset and dramatic about it.

CATH: I did once try and join I think it was a local Friends of the Earth, just to try and get in, and the local Green Party as well, but they were weird, so weird and I felt out of place as well. And I found them too emotional. They latch on to something and their arguments are so emotionally made. It is not level-headed and calmly thought out with logic, which I tend to do you know.

These kinds of positionings of others reflected the opprobrium that the ethical consumers had received themselves from conventional consumers. So people who do less are maybe ignorant, constrained and probably to be pitied, even if they can be understood. Those who do more are emotional, dramatical, dogmatic and downright weird. In effect, the ethical consumer places themselves in the only rational ethical position, and by definition other consumers have to be irrational as long as they have the freedom to make their own choices. Doing more is an over-reaction and doing less is an under-reaction given the empirical evidence.

Common-sense, commodity fetishism and consumer choice

The call for geographers to get beneath the commodity fetish, and provide consumers with the information necessary to make ethical choices (Barrett and Brown, 1998, Coulson, 1998) may appear to be a reasonable one, but just how much information is it possible for a consumer to process? Moreover, is access to extensive information about products consonant with ethical consumer action, or is it more likely to lead to further uncertainty about what it is appropriate to buy? In this section I will suggest that what the consumer actually chooses to purchase owes a lot more to common-sense thinking and commodity fetishism than it does to expert and accurate information. Furthermore, I contend that if the consumer is to be able to derive any sense of agency in their ethical consumption practices, then this dependence on common-sense and commodity fetishism is far more rational than an unlimited collection of relevant information. I will start with an extract from Cherry which reveals quite how much a large quantity of information can hamper even the simplest of choices:

> CHERRY: Soya milk, oh God. Okay. Why I buy soya milk, because um, I don't know, fair trade for me is really force of habit, but it's really weird because if I buy cow's milk I feel really bad about the milking machines and the cows and if I buy soya milk I feel really bad about the amount of aluminium, you know, that you get in the soya product and that they are actually, you know, I think there are a very small handful of companies that own soya, and I think that is bad news. And I think that is all part of the corporate cash crop thing as well. So I have this sort of funny scenario of whether or not soya milk is a good idea, or whether or not milk's a good idea, but I guess that's factory farming and when I see the situation that the cows are in in this country, it's very similar to the situation that Indian tea pickers are in ... I did buy rice milk for a while, because it isn't patented and isn't bad and doesn't give you breast cancer and isn't bad for the land it is grown on. But, I don't know, both

> rice and soya are imported predominantly from Third World countries. There is such a thing as oat milk and I have drunk quite a lot of it and it's great because you can make cappuccinos out of it, but it's really difficult to get hold of, so I'll start buying oat milk in bulk maybe, because I think that would be the answer [um] to the whole substitute question maybe. But also, I also have big problems with the amount of processing that goes through as well, so milk substitutes are a big bone of contention. I never know what I should be drinking and what I shouldn't.

What is produced by a continual flow of information with no clear identification of best practice, through practices such as ethical labelling for example, is the feeling that it is impossible to make an ethical purchase. The consumer is simply not capable of processing large quantities of information to establish the most ethical products. Clear ethical labelling therefore is an essential aid to ethical consumerism. This is not, however, to suggest that the ethical consumer has a full, working knowledge of even the simplest of ethical labelling, and at times the ethical consumer resorts to using their common-sense to make a leap of faith to trust any product which has a viable ethical image:

> ME: Do you buy the organic milk for pesticides or for animal concerns?
> |
> JO: I am not terribly sure what they mean by organic milk, whether the cows are on fields that haven't been sprayed or I don't really know, they give you no information on it, so it must be the animal food in some way affects the milk, I have no idea. It is just the fact that it is organic and it is different and it costs more, so I have sort of thought "well I better give it a try".

In quite remarkable contrast to economic rational choice theory, and without being at all sure about the actual processes involved in producing or confirming dairy produce as organic, Jo has chosen a product through the reassurance of it costing more. This faith in environmental terminology and the policy of acting against the norms of production by classifying individual products as different, and then sealing that difference by commanding a higher price, has meant that Jo has as McDonell suggests (1997:832) replaced knowledge with trust and moral judgements, aided by previous experience of ethical consumer issues. Susy takes a leap of faith in ethical products one step further. Having asked if she checked whether *Ecover* washing powder was tested on animals, she replied that this was not a problem because:

> SUSY: Well, usually, well they go along together. Usually the environmental stuff, I am just assuming, maybe wrongly, that therefore they haven't been tested on animals. I am just assuming that they are not going to be irritants to the skin [right] because they are safe, environmental products. It all tends to be mushed up together. Maybe I am assuming wrongly, but if something is going to biodegrade I just assume that you could almost drink it because it biodegrades [um] you know what I mean. And just like the *Body Shop* stuff it is all very appetising looking stuff and not made from anything that is toxic.

The inevitable lack of knowledge which is consonant with the global market system, may create an atmosphere of confusion for the consumer, but for the producer it is filled with possibilities. The ethical consumer, adrift in uncertainty and yet desiring to "do their bit", has no choice but to place their faith in somebody - albeit at times the best of a bad lot. For a company wishing to break into the ethical consumer market ,"commodifying ethicality" (Kennedy, 1996:231) - as in the above case of organic products, *Ecover* and *Body Shop* - offers the consumer an opportunity to suspend their cynicism in the manufacturing sector, producing a provisional extension of trust. That this is true was borne out by the continual mention of certain ethical retailers, in whom the interviewees placed implicit trust, believing that under the hallowed roof of such stores as *Bumblebees* their own vigilance could be relaxed in lieu of the more expert vigilance of the retailer. Rather than getting beneath commodity fetishism, as called for by the political economists, ethical labels are infact acting at times as a new form of commodity fetishism for the ethical consumer. Indeed, Cherry claims that you need no information to know if a product is fairly traded, you simply look for a picture of a smiling lady! Cook and Crang (1996, and Cook, 1998) recognise the potential of commodity fetishism for Third World producers and have echoed Taussig's (1992) call for companies to "Get with the fetish".

The suspension of cynicism is not fully the golden opportunity that it appears though. *Ecover* may have shaken off the high profile tarnishing of its halo[16], but even the great success stories, such as *Body Shop* and *Boots*, have been questioned to the extent that the consumers can no longer deny their cynicism.

[16] Ecover is a marketing success. Interviewees didn't even bother to explain their choice in Ecover to me, simply saying "And of course the old Ecover" as though its credentials had never been under doubt. The exception to this was Cherry, who becomes proof positive that questions of trust are tied in with identity issues. Cherry being an environmental road protester would not buy Ecover because of their brief ownership by Group Four- the company responsible for security at road protest sites.

Throughout the interview series, the ethical consumers referred to these cases, and trust in the companies had become contingent upon the consumer's personal reading of the stories, and the degree to which they believe the media above the company. As Kennedy (1996) points out in his work, if a company commodifies ethicality then by their very nature the people who consume those products will have it under surveillance. This necessitates continual self-monitoring by the company if they wish to maintain those customers.

A series of judgemental ethical consumer discourses ran through the transcripts: *Nestlé* bad; *MacDonalds* bad; *Ecover* good; organic good; any ethical label good; alternative medicine good; *Body Shop* and *Boots* the best of a bad bunch. More importantly these were the discourses which were acted upon. Across all the consumers only a couple of *Nestlé* products were found in the interviewees' cupboards - a considerable achievement as so many food products are made by *Nestlé.* Nearly all the consumers bought *Ecover* and recycled toilet roll, and many bought their personal hygiene products from *Boots* or *Body Shop.* Furthermore, despite the claims of reading multiple magazines linked to issues and consumer ethics no-one at any point showed me a product that they had bought based upon their research and recommendations.

My reading of this situation is that whilst consumers are more than willing to undertake ethical consumerism, cracking the brick wall between practice and information about practice is too much to ask of an individual. Julie puts this succinctly:

> JULIE: So there is a long way to go in people actually being able to exercise choice to get the products that they would like. At the moment you very much, it is very much a case of making compromises, so you are aware of a lot of things you could take into consideration, some of which are aesthetic and stylistic and some of which are practical, some of them are price and some of them are environmental and ethical, and you are looking at something that balances all of those, but often the products that offer any kind of environmental or ethical profile simply don't exist, they are not available. Or if they are, they are so hidden away and unknown for practical purposes they are not available for most people.

Whereas certain sources of information are deliberately aimed at making those products more accessible for ethical consumers, information remains difficult to accumulate and assimilate and, to be frank, few of the dedicated ethical

consumers I interviewed had a full and workable knowledge of issues and products. As consumers are confused about labelling and the impacts of their consumption, it becomes logical to act out their desires to help through well-known companies, campaigns and ethical labels. Thus personal responsibility is off-set by the responsibility taken by the investigative media, ethical agencies and ethical consumers' common actions. This leaves the ethical consumer with a compromise between the energy required to check products and the likely ethical outcome of purchasing a product. Terry Newholme, also undertaking research into ethical consumerism, has theorised ethical consumer practices through "bounded rationality"[17] and to a large extent I believe that these purchasing practices are representative of that (Newholme, 1997). The effect of this bounded rationality in the case of ethical consumerism has been that media attention of issues and companies becomes the advertising hoarding for the ethical consumer[18].

Moreover, the uncertainties inherent in the global economy mean that the consumer has little comprehension of where power is centred and therefore whose responsibility infringements of ethics really were. As the consumers variously blamed government, multiples, supermarkets, producers and other consumers for the problems derived from consumerism and held a nebulous understanding of how each group affected the whole, it became difficult to establish consistent counteraction. Therefore, although the consumer can pin-point supermarkets as a core part of the problem, the consumer will still buy a supermarket ethical label because changing the supermarket's purchasing practice will in part formulate a strand of the solution. Where blame was more apparent, or more deep rooted in the consumer's mind, more aggressive boycott action was an easier decision[19]. Cherry, with her radical distaste of all things "consumer society" was the one consumer who did consistently avoid supermarkets and held a cynical disregard for ethical labels and *Ecover*. Similarly, *Nestlé* was boycotted across the board because the ethical consumers could find no reason for their baby milk marketing ploys, and responsibility for "atrocities" fell fairly and squarely upon the shoulders of the company.

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[17] Simon's theory of bounded rationality believes that consumers have only a limited ability to make truly rational choices due to the complexity of the consumer environment. Instead the consumer makes a decision based on intuition or the actions of others or easily available solutions (Lunt, 1995: 240).

[18] Friedman claims that boycott organisers are awake to this fact, ensuring that boycotts are implemented with the maximum amount of media attention (1991, 1995).

[19] Jasper (1998: 152) sees the ability to focus blame as crucial to protest actions.

At times, either the high-profile attention to companies leaves the consumer confused about whether they should any longer support what was previously viewed as a good company, or an ethical label conflicts with the consumers awareness of issues, or there simply is no great product. What then happens is, once again, a common-sense assessment of which purchase is likely to be the best ethical bet - confirming that the willing ethical consumer uses a tactical deployment of whichever source of information allows them to construct ethical agency:

> LIZZIE: I bought vegetable stock cubes yesterday made by *Oxo*, but that is because they had Vegetarian Society logo on. And I did go through a real dilemma of Vegetarian Society approved, but made by *Oxo*. But then I thought that if you started buying vegetarian products from these companies then they will think "Oh there is a big market there" and so I was having this real kind of.. I know that if the Vegetarian Society hadn't had a symbol on it I would have bought the Sainsbury's own, but because they have the Vegetarian Society logo I thought "Well they approve".
>
> CATH: [Body Shop] I do feel, although she is not a saint, you know, I um, I do feel she's made people aware of a lot of issues, you know. I mean she says "Against animal testing". I don't know if you saw that documentary that tore it all apart, there are some ingredients that aren't actually tested on animals and her argument was you know we are not saying that all of our products aren't tested on animals, but we are against animal testing, but there are occasions where some products have been tested on animals at some point. But I think her philosophies are better than most, so I prefer to go in there.
>
> LIZZIE: I went through a stage of not buying anything from *Boots* because of all their medical testing and went to *Superdrug*. And then I thought "well at least they are making an effort and if I buy something and there is a process where I am buying things that aren't tested on animals then hopefully that will change", and the whole medical issue is a really difficult one, and I just find it really hard, and if anybody challenges me on that I would just crumble, because you know I am asthmatic - I would be dead if I didn't take asthma stuff. So I can't say I don't take anything tested on animals because I do, and I wish they didn't, I wish they wouldn't ...

Summary

I have used chapters Three and Four to piece together the various factors involved in motivating and rationalising ethical consumer practices. I have offered a detailed analysis of the complexity of consumer ethics, but at times this has been less than comprehensive in order to remain coherent. In terms of creating a personal ethical

position, I have suggested that the consumer is likely to favour certain types of knowledges which allow the individual the most rational construction of agency. For those global issues outside of the consumer's personal experience, the more rational forms of knowledge to use are those mediated through expert systems which the consumer can trust, namely those which are seen as motivated by something other than profit and those advocating the consumer's own chosen position. When it comes to product choice however, it may be more rational to choose a product through less convincing sources of information as a best guess. Furthermore, common-sense deductions can allow the consumer the agency to make a choice under conditions of uncertainty, or in the absence of information. However, the consumer is well aware that researchers such as myself are likely to give more credence to expert knowledge rather than personal knowledge, and in highlighting the role of investigative magazines over newspaper reports the ethical consumer is trying to portray themselves as rational - indeed more rational than anybody holding any other ethical position.

Chapter Five - Negotiating ethical consumerism in everyday life

> LESLEY: When I came to think about it I thought well I am not really an ethical consumer in many ways, because you can see what it is that you want to do and you want to be selective and everything, but actually, practically, in everyday life you can't quite meet your ideals.
>
> AMY: You don't have a choice ... I hadn't realised it to such an extent until I really started to look at what we did buy and what our beliefs are, and a lot of the things we buy they don't really match our beliefs.
>
> "As a child matures and becomes more complex, he (sic) is increasingly likely to encounter social situations in which several values rather than one value may come into competition with one another, requiring a weighing of one value against the other - a decision as to which value is the more important. ... Gradually, through experience and a process of maturation, we all learn to integrate the isolated, absolute values we have been taught in this or that context into a hierarchically organized system, wherein each value is ordered in priority or importance relative to other values." (Rokeach, 1973: 6).

Introduction

If the two previous empirical chapters can be summed up as consumers' explanations as to why they "do their bit", then this chapter can be viewed as the tempering of ethics with the knowledge that in the real world an individual can "only do so much". There is little doubt that there is a difference between what the consumer would ideally choose for themselves in a perfect world, and what can be chosen when everyday life interacts with idealism. As Lesley and Amy demonstrate in the quotes above, many of the ethical consumers apologised for their choices and their overall failure to fulfil their ethical positioning. Indeed, most of this chapter is written through the stories that people tell to justify actions which can be viewed as inconsistent with their beliefs (Billig, 1989, Taylor, 1989, Campbell, 1994, Singer, 1993)[1]. And yet ethical consumerism is often a triumph of belief over structural adversity, and this chapter will hopefully also act as a celebration of this fact. Much of the consumers' narratives about ethical choice were talked through in

[1] It is worth noting that Billig would argue that the consumers do not follow through their ethics because they are capable of justifying why they should not, thereby relieving the necessity (1991: 211). Whilst I accept that the consumer may be compelled to act where there is no justification for not doing so, and agree fully with Billig's suggestion that people justify their actions to appear consistent, I prefer Taylor and Singer's contention that the individual is often motivated by "unworthy" desires for which they give a moral justification.

terms of ease and difficulty, with certain products and issues being easier to ethically consume than others, depending on the context. I traced all of the consumers' explanations of the choices they had made across the three product areas. The discussion is somewhat hampered by the gross imbalance in academic writings surrounding the product areas, with food attracting phenomenal attention, but personal hygiene products (which, as I will show, contain similar, although at times opposite, concepts of inside/outside, natural/synthetic and pleasure/duty to those involved in food) and household cleaning products have attracted almost no academic interest at all.

I wish to continue the debate started in the last chapter concerning the role of absolutes, priorities and thresholds. In short, I will suggest that although the consumer has a clear idea as to the "correct" consumer behaviour resulting from their ethical positioning, in practice all absolutes, priorities and thresholds are open to degrees of flexibility, dependent upon the context of their performance. Because of this an interviewee who categorically states that she would never patronise McDonalds moments later tells a story about what she allows her children to eat when they visit the local MacDonalds. Some of the barriers to ethical consumerism are structural, such as lack of time and resources. Some are culturally contrived, for example notions of value for money. Some are the intervention of other values and ethics. Telfer (1996: 23) contends that there are four factors which limit our obligations to follow an ethical code: preserving the integrity of another ethic; giving precedence to those we care about; providing for our own happiness; and having a worthwhile life. All these barriers to action are apparent in the chapter. I have taken the reflexive explanations of the ethical consumers' choices to suggest that other needs, values and ethics ensure that actions are always <u>situated</u> rather than unconditional and constant. From this I wish to claim that the ability, and desire, to ethically consume is contingent upon product, issue area and milieux, and cannot be understood outside of these complexities.

All the product areas I selected for study were chosen upon the premise that they contained well publicised and extensively available ethical goods. This then should be the perfect place to view the impact of the diversity of other factors that complete the complex fabric of the ethical consumer's world of consumption. Whether we approach consumer choices from the position of traditional

cost/benefit analysis, contemporary consumption studies, values or ethics, what is clear is that choices are made by considering a variety of different contingencies. Tim Lang (1998) points to the number of factors involved in fruit choices (16 according to a fruit marketer), emphasising the lunacy of viewing consumption through a "single prism" (Gabriel and Lang, 1995: 109). This chapter is an examination of some of the more important factors, examining the roles of money, convenience, health, pleasure and place in determining the choice of products for private consumption.

Money

Regardless of income levels price and money were discussed by all the interviewees. I have deliberately named this section money, as opposed to cost or price, as ethical consumption is characterised by the strategic deployment of money. Rather than the forgotten commodity in chains of consumption (Desforges, 1998), ethical consumers show an awareness that money is not just something which purchases goods, it is also something which provides producers and retailers with their *raison d'etre*. Because of this price does not necessarily affect choice adversely. Certain more expensive, unnecessary products are bought to support "worthy" causes, whereas some companies and countries are boycotted wholesale, the implicit understanding being that profit is the bottom line in determining production practices.

The first and most obvious point to make about ethical consumerism is that, with the exception maybe of vegetarian and vegan products, internalising the externalities and offering a fair price to producers necessitates paying a higher price for goods. This fact had not escaped the interviewees:

> CHERRY: I think that if you've got loads of money you go out and buy all of your overpriced organic veg. It never fails to amuse me that, the fact that all of the processed food is really very cheap [right]. You go to the supermarket and you buy fake mashed potatoes and you buy them for 20 pence a packet and you wanna buy organic bread you gotta pay £1.20, you know what I mean? It never fails to baffle me. I'm sure it's just a food conspiracy with the government. But I think that ethical consumerism is a real luxury, you've got to have loads of time and you've got to have loads of money to just walk into the local health food shop and buy what you want to buy, do you know what I mean?
>
> JANE: All that matters to me is that there are no vegan products in it, that is the most important thing and then if I can afford to I'll buy green

things, but I find that the price is so ridiculous [right], I find that just because it is environmentally friendly it's four times more expensive and I do resent that.

RUBY: Yeah [organic meat] is very expensive. Chicken is £15 as opposed to £4, but I just close my eyes and I write my cheques. And I feel like, you know, people say "how can you spend that kind of money?" and I feel like I want to support this, you know, some people give to charities. Like I say the consumer dollar is so powerful. People just don't understand that the pound of theirs can make such a difference. They just look at the smaller picture and think "I don't want to pay £15 for a chicken", you know, but if everybody did there would be a lot more organic chicken farmers you know.

All the quotes above relate to environmentally friendly products, and this was the one issue area where higher costs proved to be a huge consideration. For animal welfare products price was simply not mentioned, except by Jane who claimed that as long as you stay away from "pretend" animal products veganism is the cheapest way to live. Fair trade products, whilst obviously more expensive than their conventional counterparts[2] did not attract the same annoyance as environmental products, perhaps because the cause of their higher pricing appears to be more transparent, and perhaps because of the links between buying fair trade and giving to Third World charities[3]. Cost means that the consumer can only afford (or only wishes to dedicate so much of their income to) a limited amount of products. Cherry and Mary explain how they make the choice as to which products to buy on their limited incomes:

MARY: ... organic fruit and veg, because of it being a lot of my diet, I couldn't afford to buy all my veg for the week organic ... I bought this [toothpaste] because it's not tested on animals and it has animal free ingredients. And again that is the sort of thing I can afford to buy that way because, well, because mainly I don't use it so quickly and because toothpaste is the sort of thing you only buy once in a while. So even if it is a bit dearer I only have to buy it once every two months or whatever.

CHERRY: ... if I was going to go for a health conscious diet I would be spending about three times as much as I am spending at the moment on food [um] and I can't afford to eat all organic and I am very much an all or nothing person, so if I am going to be drinking organic tea, yet eating bananas that have been fucking pelted by herbicides and pesticides then it would be a bit strange.

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[2] Typhoo tea stands out as an exception to this.

[3] Many of the interviewees were involved in Third World campaigning, fundraising and sponsorship.

Surprisingly, whereas it was food that attracted the most commitment for animal welfare and fair trade products, because of the large premiums on organic food and the necessity to purchase in quantity the possibility of regular purchase was limited. Environmentally friendly products for household cleaning and personal hygiene were generally the most consistent buys due to the infrequency of purchase[4] (although not where health was a primary motivation for the interview - see health section). This finding is in keeping with Mintel (1992) findings about which products people are most willing to pay price premiums on for environmental products, and helps to explain why household products are one area fully supplied by a range of environmentally friendly goods. The exception to this rule was Lisa, who claimed that as she had a house kitty for such things it was unfair to expect others to pay for her values.

Obviously the consumers I have talked about so far have all managed to afford to consume ethically in the first place, but times of poverty and the priorities of need formed a common part of the discourses surrounding money. Generally, the interviewees had all spent time on the dole, as students or had children, and they talked through how money and ethics had to be negotiated:

> RACHEL: ... I was still very sensitive about money around the middle of last year, because I was still unemployed, whereas my husband is like "we must buy *Ecover*" and that sort of thing, and I am looking at the prices and thinking "that is really expensive", but now we can afford it comfortably because I am earning again it is not an issue; I would just buy it anyway.
>
> JO: ... it is very satisfying to see [organic food] coming in, but you have to be prepared to pay a lot more for it, sometimes double, and if I had my family young and at home no way could I have afforded that. But I suppose I can buy it now because my needs are far less.

Those ethical consumers who had limited finances still deployed some money for ethical purchases, as shown by Cherry and Mary, but these funds tended to find specific channels for outlet. Animal welfare would be the area most likely to have

[4] Rules which apply to goods based on the frequency of purchase rumble all the way through this chapter. Whether something is a "sensible" buy is not just related to the factor being considered, but more to the factor under consideration in ratio to the likely amount of times the specific product will be bought. See, for example, points under health, pleasure and checking ingredients.

money ploughed into it by the vegetarians and vegans, even for the products, such as free range eggs, which commanded premiums - adding to the notion of identity ethics as being those most consistently performed. There was a strong feeling amongst all the consumers that if they had more money they would buy more ethical products, but the extent to which this would actually happen has to be questioned. At what point does money begin to be in surplus large enough to allow the consumer not to consider cost? Miller (1995: 37) points out that consumption is balanced against thrift, which is both a virtue[5] and an end in itself rather than simply a means to an end (1998: 49). In practice this would mean that even after the whole need/want argument engendered by the limits of income has been succeeded by the luxury to afford all basic necessities (probably accounting for most of my interviewees), the role of price would be no less important. Whether something costs too much is determined upon relative rather than absolute price. In other words, paying too far over the odds is as frivolous as buying an unethical product:

> MARY: I mean I don't buy the Whole Earth baked beans because they are a pound a tin when you can buy them for 20p in the supermarket"
>
> LIZZIE: Something like this [a plastic tub of tomatoes] I would never normally buy, but it was reduced to 30p, and I would normally buy five tomatoes for 60p and then I thought "oh you get a whole tub".

Whilst Mary does have a shortage of money, and may be unable to afford a pound for beans (though perhaps if all beans were a pound the price would not necessarily mean she could no longer afford beans), Lizzie's budget does not preclude her from being able to pay her usual price for tomatoes. What in fact prevented Lizzie, a consumer who will put in an inordinate amount of effort to secure environmental products, from buying the more environmentally friendly option was the lure of the bargain. Miller (1998: 61) claims that for some consumers the thrill of shopping was in the purchasing of bargains, and in this case Lizzie displays her talent for shopping through her recognition of bargains. Bocock (1993: 54) argues that we are not natural consumers, we have to be socialised into desiring modern levels of consumption: the scarcity of money ensures that much of that socialisation involves the learning of appropriate prices for goods. Some

[5] The notion of thrift as a virtue seemed to be borne out more by the older interviewees who appeared to hold the moral high ground when it came to comprehending the meaning of shortage of money, and having to make do.

products it is fine to pay more for (labelled trainers), others should be judged by their lower price - although cheapest is not always synonymous with best (as stores such as Aldi have been finding out). Rather than a straight-forward cost/benefit analysis consumers find that whether the benefits are worth the cost is often subject to cultural coding. Because of this the increased prices consonant with ethical products can be viewed as creating both a structural and a cultural limit to the likely amount of ethical consumption a consumer would be willing to undertake. For ethical consumers the twin processes of the ethics of thrift and the ethics of concern come to be played out, at times almost arbitrarily, through notions of "the cheapest or the best"; where the best signifies the most ethical:

> SUSY: You see there are definite boundaries where I can't be bothered with that sort of stuff. I was going to buy some shampoo or something, actually it was conditioner, and I was looking and there was the really right on one for lots of money and the cheapest, non-right on one, so I thought "The cheapest non-right on one", which is all right.
>
> CHERRY: All of the beauty products that I buy are either the cheapest I can get my hands on, and never mind the rest, or it's pretty right on really, products that are really alternative and healthy.

Convenience

The second thing the ethical consumers generally agreed about was that ethical consumerism was inconvenient and took a lot of time and effort to undertake. In addition to the huge demands made by the need to find out issue and product information, many of the products are either only available from specialist shops, or have only just become available in supermarkets, requiring organisation of shopping time, and trips to several shops:

> RACHEL: I usually have to go into a health food shop once a week and quite a lot of my food comes from health food shops ... having sort of blitzed the health shop and spending far too much money we would probably just go to a supermarket ... There is a butcher in Holland Park, *Lidgates*, which is a quality [organic] butcher and that is where I normally go, because it is on the Central Line and so is my job, but um, sometimes at the weekend we go to the Queensway area and we go to *Planet Organic* sometimes and that is very good as well.
>
> JO: I always go out of my way now to support a local shop that is er, but you don't live in the area so you don't know, I have to go a little bit out of my way, but I try to work it in when I go to give lessons to one of my students in Chingford. I stop by the shop and buy things from him because all his stuff is organic so you know that it is just about

> everything that he has, so my washing powder, my washing up liquid, my cleaning materials, candles, your dried fruit, your cereals, he has everything. Not that I only buy from him, because it is inconvenient, but whenever I can.

Whilst nearly all of the consumers used a variety of shops to do their weekly grocery shopping, only one of the interviewees claimed never to use a supermarket[6]: Cherry stated that she would rather pay double than go through the stress of visiting a supermarket. For the rest, the supermarket was seen as a necessary (and not particularly unpleasant) evil. Indeed, much of the convenience of shopping at a large store had an ethical explanation:

> LESLEY: [You can't meet your ideals] ... I suppose partly with the products it is due to availability, um locally and maybe, I remember the place I was living before you could walk down to Stratford and there was a shop there where you could buy *Ecover* and things like that ... I was thinking about if it was a case of getting on a bus and buying something, then in a way you are kind of defeating the object.
>
> JULIE: We both go shopping together and we have got a range of wheeled vehicles including a shopping trolley that we use for lugging shopping back, or of course we carry it which is good exercise, and helps fight off the risk of oesteoporosis for women: weight bearing exercise. We also tend to drop off our recycling on the way round to the supermarket, so we set off with a couple of plastic bags of empty bottles, and perhaps a newspaper, box of newspaper, whatever. We don't get much in cans, but every now and then we have cans to drop off. But it is useful having the recycling bins on the trek down to the supermarket... of course the supermarket is the regular for the weekly stock up. It's the only shop for instance within walking distance that actually sells wholemeal bread, and so that is the main thing that we go for there. It is also the only organic and free-range supplier within walking distance.

So, supermarkets - they're cheap, they're convenient, they also sell a wide ethical range and are health inducing: hardly surprising that there is no other retailer to touch them in the country. It is the combination of convenience, choice and price that make them so irresistible to the ethical consumers. Mary says that she would love to see a store which already had checked all their products and had a full range under one roof - unfortunately those stores that have managed to do this

[6] And this was reflected throughout the findings of the questionnaire survey as well. In retrospect the questionnaire was poorly worded, asking where the consumer regularly bought "ethical" products. From this wholefood/healthfood shops came out top with 81%. However, supermarkets still attracted 76%, making them the second most popular ethical retailer.

and were mentioned, for example *Bumblebees* and *Out of this World*, were often referred to as costly. In the end the consumer does not buy all ethical products and, as I will explain later in this chapter, the consumer does not even wish to buy all ethical products. So a store which only deals in ethical products ends up becoming inconvenient, and loses its ethical trade to the conventional store where the consumer has more options open to them.

Once inside a shop or supermarket, ethically consuming can once more become time consuming, depending upon how much effort the consumer is willing to put in to checking the potential ethicality of their purchases. There was a variety of different levels of ethical screening, but all of the consumers admitted to being label conscious at some point in their shopping routines. Lizzie was possibly the most devoted all round ethical consumer I interviewed, and she put large amounts of effort into her ethical consumerism; Rachel admits to being more motivated by her own health; whereas Lesley was a dedicated vegetarian and fair trader, but was more flexible in her consumption habits. Here is how they describe their commitment to checking ethicality:

> LIZZIE: ... you know when we were supermarket shopping, I'm used to spending hours lingering in a supermarket, and it doesn't really bother me because I love food and I love cooking and I love experimenting, and Angela just likes to go in, get out, cook breakfast, the most basic thing, doesn't really like cooking - she just likes eating. And I would stand there checking ingredients and she'd say "Oh God it is so boring, you've been standing there for half an hour" and I'd be like "Oh, sorry".
>
> ME: Do you tend to read all the ingredients on your products?
> |
> RACHEL: Um, yes, I think. If it is going to become a staple food, definitely. If it is just something that is a frivolity, like a funny looking ice-cream for a treat, I am less bothered if I am only going to eat it once or twice, but by and large I can taste the additives and I just think "this is disgusting". But yeah I am quite wanting to know what is in stuff, so if I consume stuff with additives in it is knowingly, but thinking "I don't do this often" sort of thing.
>
> LESLEY: ... I might buy a one off thing without necessarily thinking or taking in who the company is that I have bought, but after buying one product I would think about it, and then I won't buy it again when I sort of realise and look at the small print and think "Oh dear, it is that, you know, it is made by *Rowntree* or whatever".

The difference in commitment to checking the ethicality of a product was matched by the amount of inconvenience the consumers would put themselves to in order to secure an ethical product. Stories of tracking down particularly elusive environmentally friendly goods ran through several of the transcripts. The willingness of different consumers to expend time and energy (especially that of the greenhouse gas creating type) are demonstrated by the explanations provided by three consumers as to their choice of washing powder. Lizzie and Suzy are flatmates and provide two sides to the same story. Mary obviously feels like she has acted against her principles, but not quite through her own fault:

> LIZZIE: The other week I couldn't do any washing for a week, because I could not find a washing powder that was environmental. I went to the big Sainsbury's, I work in Chiswick and there is a huge Sainsbury's there and they always do a green care range, but for some reason they don't do it any more, and I eventually had to wait until Saturday so that I could come up to Euston and go get some washing powder and I was so furious. I had been to four supermarkets and none of them you know, Sainsbury's, Tesco's, Safeways and in none of them could I find a washing powder that was environment and animal friendly. They tend to be one thing or the other. Loads of them are environment friendly, so they say, but still tested on animals, and I just find the fact that they don't think about these things in conjunction very strange. Whereas Susy just thought Sod it and went out and bought some of Sainsbury's own brand. ... sometimes it gets to the point where all three of us can't be bothered, me less so than the others, but I think that it is just because I have been doing it for longer.
>
> SUSY: ... the last washing powder that I bought was Sainsbury's *Novon* because they didn't have any of the other stuff. Lizzie didn't, Lizzie surprised me, it was sort of like "wow, that is really good". She needed some washing powder that was environmentally friendly so she didn't buy any, whereas I needed the washing powder so I just bought the other stuff, so yeah.
>
> MARY: Oh God, I did buy some *Radion* the other week. I went to the shop and it was closed so I had to like buy this powder. It's the first time I've ever bought any washing powder like that, but I was stuck. ... But I had to buy it because my cat pissed on my bed, so I had to buy some.
>
> ME: So you feel guilty?
>
> MARY: Yeah, I feel really quite bad about it.

Clearly then, the consumer develops their own standards for behaviour. Some consumers, such as Lizzie, are determined to try to live up to her ethical ideals as much as possible in terms of the effort she is willing to put in to her shopping,

whereas other consumers are relatively happy to allow themselves some leeway to live a simple life. The interviewees displayed differences in their levels of commitment to ethical consumerism, and each had a particular area which they felt precluded them from ethical consumerism and used this area as a justification for lack of action. For Cath, and to some extent Jane, the problem was time and convenience - an obvious issue for mothers with young children. The problems of sparing the time and energy to shop ethically with kids were mentioned several times in the interviews:

> JANE: Sometimes *Bumblebee's* drives me mad ... the laid back attitude in there, when you just want to whizz in and out, and I am always rushing, especially with children and everything. Sometimes I love supermarket shopping, I can just dash round ...
>
> CATH: I did have a list of all the companies I had to boycott, and you would go round the supermarket with the kids and you would have to remember to bring it, and there is only so much you can do. When I get more time I will probably get more into it.

Convenience as efficient products is at a premium when children are involved, and Cath tells of the realities of motherhood ousting ethical considerations:

> CATH: Before I had Jane, you know, it was going to be cloth nappies and there were a few companies that would deliver and take-away. But motherhood took me by surprise and erm, I was a bit ill after Jane as well, I had severe anaemia which just left me totally exhausted, and the thought of having to wash nappies as well. You can change them 12 times a day when they are little, you know, and I was like "God, I wasn't aware of this". And that was my one like luxury, I suppose, and then I thought I will do it again with Anne.

The inconvenience of inefficient and time consuming products was constantly mentioned by the interviewees. Some of the problems created seemed acceptable to the consumers, such as Mary who continued to live with a limescaled toilet rather than pay the environmental cost of cleaning it efficiently, but other areas were deemed to be absolute necessities. The first of these I shall discuss is organic box schemes. Delivered to the door, certified organic fruit and vegetables, at first glance this would appear to be the ultimate in convenience shopping. However, the reality for the many interviewees who had joined a box scheme (Jane excepted, who continues to be very happy with her scheme) was that the situation quite quickly became untenable.

CATH: I used to have a box scheme, but it was all a bit dodgy.

LIZZIE: I was part of an organic, well getting vegetables delivered from an organic supplier and they were disgusting. [Really?]. Yeah, a lot of them were off by the time we got them, which really annoyed me because they were expensive, but the worst thing was they could only tell you that they would deliver some time between 4pm and 10pm on a Wednesday and I don't get back from work until 7, "Woo, we can't guarantee it, we'll leave them outside the front door" and I wasn't living here then, I was living in a much more dodgy place and they would just get nicked and I am not going to spend 16 quid on vegetables which would just get nicked. So I had to give up, which was a pity because the vegetables that weren't off were really delicious.

The second area mentioned where ethics underwent a stark reality check was the absolute necessity of remaining the only species calling your house "home". Lisa is a strict vegan, and Lesley is a vegetarian. Here is what happened when their homes became invaded by ants:

LISA: We did buy some stuff a few months ago because we became infested with ants in here, and um, it was absolutely horrifying and I felt really bad because a couple of my flatmates had just moved in. I thought "I can't have a flat full of ants" and so I just went straight, without even thinking about it, I thought "right, I am going to buy some ant powder and get rid of them". As far as I can tell it was a deterrent rather than something that killed them, because I put it down and they never came back. I mean I don't try to set out to kill insects, but I despise insects and I wish they would all disappear. Nevertheless, I think it is immoral to try and kill them.

LESLEY: There is some ant killer that Andy bought, to my horror, but um a couple of summers ago there were loads of ants coming into the house, that, I don't know, because I feel a bit um, because I wouldn't go out and buy something like that, but in a way I am relieved that Andy will go out and buy something like that.

The sanctity of an animal welfare ethic is called into question here, and when the overwhelming desire to dominate and destroy certain unwelcome visitors comes into play it is wise to kill first and offer a sop to the conscience later. Despite Lesley's protestations that she would never kill ants herself, no doubt she would have made a push to "deter" them, as Lisa did, if her husband had not been about. An animal welfare ethic does not necessarily preclude killing, it simply draws the hazy line of compassion further down the food chain. Lisa and Lesley described killing ants as an unpleasant, but necessary fact of life, in pretty much the same

way as many of the consumers who had ceased to be vegetarian described eating meat - with the same reflexive portrait of the imposition of some contingency making their actions necessary.

The problems of inconvenience and absolute necessity might be overcome if it were as simple as mouldy vegetables and killing ants, but at the point where taste and pleasure intercept, comes the issue of "what is the point of buying something to eat if you don't like the taste or look of it?". Thus whilst many people may praise the wonderful taste of organic vegetables, Rachel confesses that she often does not buy them because they do not look as good as conventional vegetables. And when it comes to a nice cup of coffee... Here are two explanations from people involved in fair trade. The first, Rachel, works for a fair trade organisation, and was happily telling me how she buys fair trade coffee when her husband intervened. The second, Pam, talks about trying to sell early fair trade coffee to Quakers, and the reasons for its failure:

> Peter: Well, if push comes to shove we will use the *Cafe Direct*, but I would much rather not because it is not particularly good.
>
> RACHEL: But you are using the *Percol* one.
>
> Peter: We are using the *Percol* one. And there is one that is fair traded and organic.
>
> RACHEL: And we liked that one.
>
> Peter: That one was good.
>
> RACHEL: So what we have been doing is experimenting with the fair traded coffees to find one we like and now that we have found one we like we would buy that one if we could, but we would resort to a *Cafe Direct.*
>
> Peter: At the end of it we would resort to a non-fair trade, non-organic one because at the end of it we are up for a decent cup of coffee.

> PAM: Well, I was a Traidcraft rep and I took the Traidcraft stuff into meetings and I actively tried to persuade the meeting to switch to Traidcraft coffee and in those days having had the campaign coffee, which wasn't very nice and there was a reaction against it because it didn't taste very nice, and I used to make statements like "we need to convert our tastebuds to conform with our principles, not the other way round", um, but you don't win converts that way you only offend people, and they think you are stuck up and it doesn't work, it is not effective.

> But when they got the newer coffee and I persuaded them to buy that and then that worked, because it was nice coffee and so on.

The truth about ethical products, particularly food and personal hygiene products (and I will return to this in the health section), is that they need to be as efficient or as good as conventional products for the majority of ethical consumers to buy them. Cath has a succinct question: "Why can't fair trade taste good?", and there seems to be no reason why not (unlike removing certain chemicals from cleaning products where it is more obvious how that could limit performance). So whilst the consumer may accept clothes without a bluey whiteness, coffee, fruit and vegetables are expected to taste as good as conventional products. It is no coincidence that organic food is so successful when it is portrayed as tasting better than food sprayed with pesticides. Apart from the higher cost, limiting to many consumers, it is a win-win situation - better health, better taste, better ethics.

Bodily duties

Although I had not originally anticipated the large role that health and the body would play in the narratives of the consumers, in retrospect the discourse appears obvious. Diet now forms a central strand of government health campaigns (Bell and Valentine, 1997: 46) and media interest in health issues has increased steadily over the last three decades (Warde, 1997: 78). The expert advice about what constitutes "healthy" is reminiscent of the expert formulation of environmental risk (Beck, 1992) and those fearing one set of risks to the self are likely to fear the other. Moreover health issues offer validity to many of the ethical consumer arguments (for example vegetarianism and BSE). Following through the consumers' discourses on health and ethical consumerism shows how the body's dictates can both strengthen and negate the consumer's ethical constructs. Furthermore, the differences apparent across the product areas show the cultural construction of the meanings of healthy and natural, and call into question some of the literatures in this area which have concentrated solely on food.

Nearly all the consumers agreed that they tried to make healthy eating part of their dietary regime. The exception to this was Lesley, a nurse, who obviously felt that it should be taken into account, but accepted that it was not really a primary concern and she enjoyed sweet things. However, she appeared to be under the impression that this transgressed some sort of code of ethical lifestyle practice, and apologised

for not sprouting beans, drinking herbal tea and other "healthy", "ethical" practices. Whilst there was considerable consensus about what constituted healthy eating in general - olive oil (found in all the respondents cupboards) the epitome of healthy; organic food being unanimously agreed as good; processed food being perceived as less healthy; and alternative medicine a more natural way to health - when it came animal products there was no agreement at all. Health issues appeared to be a motivating factor for certain diets, but were also evidently being used as practical support for the chosen diet. The remarkable variety of "expert" opinions as to what constitutes the best nutritional value for the body was never more emphasised than in the plethora of "healthy diets" demonstrated by the interviewees.

> AMY: [The osteopath] says that meat consumption is really bad for anybody who has eczema so we went vegetarian for a year... this time I stopped eating red meat because I had terrible gut problems and when I stopped eating red meat my gut improved.
>
> LIZZIE: I went through a stage when I was doing my finals of eating fish and I think that was because I needed brain food.
>
> JANE: ... I've met lots of vegan doctors and whatever, and I now really believe that it is the healthiest diet to be a vegan.

Believing in the healthiness of particular foods and diets because of the vitamins, minerals and properties of the food showed the interviewees' awareness of the discourses of diet as primary healthcare. But if the quotes above sound as though the interviewees are taking expert views to clarify their own beliefs and fit in with their own desires, then this becomes even clearer in the following quotes. The consumers often used the body as a natural indicator as to what was necessary to the self as an individual. Even Amy (who placed phenomenal faith in the opinions of doctors and suffers from M.E.) disobeyed the nutritional advice given to her because of the more important indications of what she claims to be the needs of her body:

> AMY: I have developed a yen for fish in the last few months, and I don't know why because it doesn't bother me usually, so it must be something to do with my health. I've actually been going down the hill again for the last six weeks, so I try and intuitively go with what I need, so I've had some fish today.
>
> RACHEL: When I don't have animal protein when I am working full-time I don't seem to have that stamina that I need, so then that wins out and I try to eat a bit of meat every other day.

> SUSY: I do have a sweet tooth and it usually happens when I have got my period and I have pangs for chocolate, and last time I think I bought chocolate ice-cream and this time I got chocolate spread.

The belief that it was possible to derive efficient information about dietary needs from bodily desires reflects Lupton's research findings (1996: 83). The body was similarly capable of discerning undesirable food stuffs, the worst offender being artificial sweeteners - going some way to conflict with the standard discourse that sugary foods were bad[7].

> LIZZIE: I don't like, I can't stand artificial sweeteners. I avoid them like the plague actually. I just think they are really bad for you and they taste disgusting as well, and I try to buy things without too many additives in, just because I don't think you need them.

> CATH: Some of the things they put in food. I read the ingredients and I just can't eat it. I think having eaten fresh, and you know freshly prepared food and you go back to eating frozen food and I think "Oh God", you know it tastes so artificial.

Generally frozen foods were avoided in favour of fresh foods. A high value was placed upon cooking from first principles, viewed as creating naturally better meals. In-keeping with other research findings the interviewees did regard processed food as less natural and less healthy than fresh food (Lupton, 1996: 61, Bell and Valentine, 1997: 46), in particular, processed cheese, which frequently occurred in vegetarian narratives as an especially unpleasant, synthetic and valueless food substance. The problem of artificial food was rarely clarified though. Apart from leading to vitamin deficiencies, only Lizzie verbalised any personal concern about the effects of processed food upon the body, making the impacts of the unnatural explicit in a manner akin to Mary Douglas' notion of impurity as matter out of place (Douglas, 1984):

> LIZZIE: I worry about preservatives, because I wonder what happens to our bodies after we die if we have had loads of preservatives, maybe just take years to decompose.

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[7] There was little in the transcripts to suggest that the ethical consumers did view sweet foods as bad. Although the interviewees frequently talked about having a sweet tooth as though this was in contrast to a healthy diet, there was a very real belief that always eating "good" things was damaging and all foods were needed within limits. In fact I gained the impression that rather than unhealthy, sweet foods were viewed as falling outside of the pressures imposed upon women to conform to society's standards, and therefore naughty, in a very rewarding sense. I will talk more about this in the next section.

For the vegetarians and vegans interviewed ready-meals appeared less disgusting than for the meat eaters. Lizzie claimed that vegetarian processed food was less unhealthy than meat food, due to the very constitution - vegetables perceived as a more constantly healthy product than meat. However, I think the reluctance to condemn processed food out of hand stemmed more from the fact that vegetarian cooking was seen as more time-consuming, with less variety. For those who had been vegetarian or vegan for long periods of time, edible frozen meals are a relatively new invention off-setting the downsides of a limited diet, and therefore holding a greater premium than processed meat products.

Interestingly, the vegetarian/vegan discourses surrounding what constitutes healthy food, and the arguments about the exact nature of the harm that unhealthy foods do to the body at no point found those products particular to vegetarian/vegan animal food substitutes in conflict with their concerns. Despite the close links between the biotechnology industry and vegetarianism through the production of novel foods, this was never mentioned as a problem or a possibility for boycott. Even more surprisingly, although genetic engineering was unanimously indentified as a terrible risk, not one of the interviewees condemned the production of chymasin, the genetically modified enzyme which replaces the animal derived rennet in cheese. It is not inconceivable that without any media comment on these products, the ethical consumer had failed to understand that consumer demand for novelty foods in the form of meat alternatives helps to drive the unpopular agrochemical business. Similarly without a public debate, the ethical consumer who makes the unpleasant link could allow themselves to ignore it as a necessary evil. Hence, it seems logical to conclude that what is acceptable both morally and bodily has been culturally produced and then personally negotiated to be in-keeping with the consumer's own values.

Many arguments have been put forward about the role of culture in determining what is naturally edible (Eder, 1996, Lupton, 1994), and emphasis has been placed on the uniting of inside and outside through safe food being allowed into the body, assimilating the external into the internal (Atkinson, 1983, Fischler, 1988, Falk, 1996). Natural foods become synonymous with health, due to the assumption that all food has medical significance, being the primary point of deliberate self-

intervention with the body (Fischler, 1988: 280). Because of this the self can become polluted from the inside by transgressing the oral boundary (Lupton, 1996: 113). These theories may appear so rational that they become obvious, but when research into ethical consumerism is extended past the field of food and into bathroom products, including the medicine cabinet, startling contradictions are apparent. Firstly, the constituents of healthy products and associated discourses become confused. Secondly, the segregation of inside and outside, and the boundaries of the body, are seen to have far more complex workings. I wish to engage in these debates, but this is first and foremost a thesis on the performance of ethics. I will, therefore, return to clarify my findings after tracing the differences in ethics across the product areas.

When questioned about personal hygiene products, it quickly became apparent that the ethical consumers did not apply their ethics consistently across all areas. Whilst the consumers had been strong in their ethical commitments when applied to food (and cleaning products), in general the strength of commitment was considerably less in relation to personal hygiene. Most of this laxity was due to the efficacy of "natural", ethical products, especially where bodily discourses were relevant. Food is often singled out as a substance applicable to pressures for bodily surveillance, with ascribed health and self-control indicators, and for balancing the nature of health and indulgence. And yet all of these understandings apply equally to personal hygiene products, with attitudes to body odours and blemishes as culturally controlled as body size, the health of skin, teeth and eyes being daily personal hygiene concerns and the interviewees talked about the same sort of pleasures derived from pampering the self in the bathroom as they did through food. Given the similarities between the two areas, where better to view consistency of ethics and cultural discourses.

Lisa was a strict vegan, and viewed with displeasure anything that involved animal products. However, having avoided all animal food products, her bathroom revealed a contradictory set of values, with a variety of animal tested products. I asked Lisa about this, and although she tried to justify her purchase it became apparent that she simply did not take animal testing into consideration for certain products:

ME: Do you worry about animal testing for your contact lens solutions?

|
LISA: No, I don't think about it to be honest. Yeah, I am not as keyed up on all things as I could be. I am, I don't know whether these are, I can't imagine that saline solution is particularly harmful to, well I am sure the solution is not particularly harmful to whatever it is tested on.
|
ME: Are you as concerned about animal testing as you are about animal farming?
|
LISA: I am, yeah.
|
ME: So do the two go together?

LISA: Yes, I think they do, but I think that unconsciously I have considered them differently because, um, if I had been buying a particular chemical or something for, um, years I tend to carry on doing it without really thinking about it, but you know if you are vegetarian then you always have it in mind when you go shopping for food or whatever.

It would be easy to write off Lisa's comments as revealing an area of consumption which is devoid of the lifestyle coding of veganism, but this pattern of contradiction was common across the consumers for certain products, namely contact lens solutions and medicines, especially painkillers. Lizzie, having gone so much out of her way to buy washing powder that was environmentally friendly, but not tested on animals, because in her words "I can't bear the thought of it next to my skin", buys animal tested contact lens solution and painkillers. Why?

LIZZIE: It is the same as the medical thing. To me this is a medical thing.

Personal health takes priority other ethics. Vegetarian food is seen as unlikely to cause physical harm, putting substances into the eyes which are untested may well do so. Wearing make-up which has not been tested on animals is one thing, taking medicine that has not been tested on animals is something quite different. Conventional medical products are technologically produced, and contain chemicals, unlike most foods. The law, therefore, requires them to be tested efficiently, and that means on animals primarily. And whilst the consumers tended to be in agreement over the more natural and, therefore, desirable nature of alternative medicine, it was viewed as unreliable in practice. In contrast to natural meaning healthy in food, natural had more than one meaning in those products which could be coded as medical (including toothpaste).

There is a whole range of "natural", ethical personal hygiene products, as characterised by the replica *Body Shop* goods - *Boots* even call their range "the *Natural range*". These products were generally regarded as efficient and more pleasant than their conventional counterparts. The threshold to the "natural is good" discourse for non-medical products was quite high, but inevitably came at the stage where bodily surveillance required a very efficient product. For example, the deodorants chosen, whilst generally not animal tested, were not the more earthy of the available choices. Lesley explains why:

> LESLEY: For quite a while I didn't use any deodorant, at least I don't mean that, for quite a while I tried to use a Friends of the Earth crystal thing and I just didn't find that it worked at all. Maybe if I was doing a less active job it wouldn't be a problem, but I've tried all different things from health food shops and nothing actually works. So something that says on it, like Sure 24 hour, that is very tempting to buy and so that is what I actually use.

Natural may well be valued culturally, and ethically, when it involves food which is healthy and effective at keeping the body in socially correct maintenance, but it has no cultural value at all when it allows the body to sweat, rot or ail. Where there is no cultural value and no cultural discourse, there is always going to be a limit to the ethical action it can command. At this juncture culturally constructed bodily dictates are of more import than animal or environmental dictates, and the consumer feels legitimate in allowing themselves to forsake their ethical constructions.

On the other hand, where an ethic holds strong, the body can then become a potential site of contamination: through the skin from touching, the lungs from smelling and stomach from eating. This contamination is often caused by the polluting of a vegetarian or vegan by animal produce, with even the smell of dead flesh becoming repulsive in the same way that the body rejects poisons. The consumers talked about becoming more sensitive, undergoing wholesale physical changes, emphasising the culturally (and psychologically) constructed nature of edible/poisonous. However, as can be seen, in contrast to Lupton's (1996: 113) claims that pollution can happen after substances pass the oral boundary of the mouth, the body can be polluted in a variety of ways:

> LISA: I don't think I expected when I became a veggie that that would have any effect on my olfactory senses or whatever. I have noticed and my veggie friends have noticed that when you become a vegetarian

> and far more when you're vegan, you develop a keener sense of smell and things start smelling completely different as well. If I smelt a steak cooking it wouldn't smell like steak it would smell like dead. And if I go past a butchers or near meat I would feel like my lungs were unclean, which is surprising to me because only a few years ago I enjoyed that smell. Now I feel like I have got a disease if I smell it... Once at work one of the containers of meat was partially open and I got blood all over my hand and it was terrible. I felt like I was holding a dead animal. I had to run off and scrub my hands.
>
> LIZZIE: Yeah, the smell is just revolting. I mean I got on the tube last night, it was the last tube going back from Leicester Square, you know what it's like, and this guy was eating, I didn't know what it was but my stomach was literally retching. It turned out to *be Kentucky Fried Chicken* and I thought "oh my God, I'm going to be sick, I'm going to be sick" ... I was actually holding my breath for four stops until he got off.

Whilst the belief that the very essence of dead animal can pollute the body will undoubtedly raise cynical responses in those who have other ethics, the contaminating nature of chemicals is somewhat more accepted: take medical evidence of the carcinogenic impacts of certain pesticides for example. However, many of the interviewees claimed to suffer from allergies from environmentally unfriendly chemicals, and the psychological nature of their revulsion to animal products has to bring in to question the nature of contamination. If cleanliness is a modern obsession (Lupton, 1996: 114), then it is one that is hampered by environmental concerns. Instead of germs as the enemy, the ethical consumers had a greater distrust of chemical cleaners:

> SUSY: I am very conscious of, for example, using non [environmentally friendly] stuff in the bath. I did clean the bath once, and we had some non stuff or did we, I can't remember. But I do have a recollection of cleaning the bath and being pedantic about making sure all the cleaning stuff was washed away, as I could see it as being an irritant.

Some of the consumers used green products, some used conventional products as infrequently as possible, and several used no bought products at all, resorting to hot water, vinegar and lemon juice. It was striking that these consumers who had become anxious about all sorts of things had decided that cleanliness was not a necessity. Jane claimed that her flat had been so unclean that her friends had come round to clean it and Lesley, the nurse, said that she believed that having your own germs in your own home was beneficial to building up immunity. Whilst none of the consumers lived in a pigsty, their calm attitude towards a "natural

balance" between dirt and cleaner (otherwise known as germicide/pesticide) showed that they placed ethics of health above the moral discourse of cleanliness.

What I have aimed to show in this section is the tenuous relationship of healthy-natural claims. Where the ethical consumer perceives natural products as healthy, then this helps to stimulate ethical consumerism. Where the ethical consumer sees natural products as opposed to the best possible health, then ethical consumerism will be diminished. What is a healthy natural product is negotiated through public discourses and private imaginings of bodily impacts. Rather than food containing a separate health discourse to other areas of consumption by being a uniquely liminal substance, capable of uniting inside and out, the narratives of consumers show a huge range of nebulous discourses, which has the lungs and the skin as bodily parts which can be affected by "poisonous" contaminants, from which the body develops extreme measures of revulsion to ensure that the individual avoids contact. These "poisons" are culturally and psychologically derived, and show little constancy - with chemicals bad in food, but good in medicine. It was never my intention to conduct a study into health concerns, and I have indulged in these debates because they have relevance to the ability to consume ethical products. I do however suggest that those theorists dealing with bodily discourses surrounding food take the time to examine other consumption areas, because on the strength of this minor cross-over of theories I have developed serious doubts about single product area studies.

Pleasure

Ethical consumerism is often perceived as the very anathema to pleasure. It has an image of denial, and as Schultz (1997: 39) points out, denial in consumer society is seen as ascetic and painful self-immolation on the altar of duty. The current morality of the market is one of self-satisfaction achieved through taking as much as possible, rather than denying the self anything which it desires. In this climate, where the ethical consumers were aware that the practice of ethical consumerism is viewed as one of renunication, complaints about lack of choice and doing without were down-played in favour of dispelling the unhappy associations of ethical identities. Pleasure ultimately came to play a part in justifying actions through making the self happy - the imperative of any consumer - with emphasis placed on

refinding the joys of novelty in everyday goods, and taking a break from ethics as a purely hedonistic act of indulgence in the pleasures of the unethical.

Perhaps paradoxically for a section entitled "pleasure" I have chosen as the starting point the stories told about the problems encountered by the consumers through the lack of ethical choice. Most often, the complaints about lack of choice and self-denial were told for a particular reason, such as the consumer trying to demonstrate her dedication in the face of unpleasant deprivation. The points were rarely dragged out, being more of a passing comment. The same consumer was almost certain to offer the opposite claim at some point in the interview series, in an attempt to show that ethical consumerism was not in fact a difficultly, seemingly unaware that they had contradicted themselves:

> LIZZIE: When I went home my sister had bought arctic rolls and I couldn't eat that because there was gelatine in it and that really annoyed me. ... Cakes would be nice to eat, but they nearly all have gelatine in.
>
> JO: There is never the choice [in organic produce] that is available in the rest of the other produce.
>
> JO: I still have my choices. Before the produce was not organic, unless you happened to be out in the country and you would see these farm shops and you would stop and buy and you would know that it was fresh, or you could go out and pick, but that was only a couple of times a year. Now that it is coming into these little shops I know it is available, and also it is being stocked in the supermarkets.

It is apparent to me that rather than this representing an attempt to conceal the fact that the consumers find ethical consumerism an unhappy and ascetic experience, it expresses two different notions of pleasure that the interviewees have achieved through their consumption choices. The first is the joy of feeling good about themselves as ethical beings. The second is the very real pleasures that are derived from restricted choices.

The fact that the consumers complain about the lack of choice when trying hard to defend their actions, suggests that they are taking the opportunity to enjoy the feeling of self-worth gained by choosing not to consume certain products. Fiske (1989: 24-26) puts forward an argument about the derivation of pleasure from consumption which takes as its basis de Certeau's and Williamson's theories of

resistance and empowerment. At any given moment, Fiske contends, the consumer (especially the female consumer) who is normally disempowered in the economic system, assumes control. The amount of goods rejected compared to the ones selected allows the consumer pleasure from the feeling of empowerment. The ethical consumer can, therefore, achieve satisfaction from their deliberate construction of a paucity of choice, which helps to off-set the disappointment of constraint. The idea of empowerment crosses both the aforementioned ways of deriving pleasure through ethical consumerism, but to begin with I will quote some of the interviewees' comments about the positive gains to self-esteem which are created by feeling in control:

> LESLEY: I would like to say, as well as a feeling of guilt there is also a satisfaction that at least I am trying, so it is not something that you are doing that you don't feel happy about.
>
> CATH: I still enjoy it you know. If I can find a product that is fairly traded and organic and tastes great I think great you know, and I will carry on buying it. ... I suppose I see it as a challenge. A hobby maybe.
>
> ME: Do you, I mean is it something that you actively enjoy, going to visit all these things, is it interesting or ...
> |
> LIZZIE: Yes it is. It's feeling like you are actually doing something - really, actually making a difference.
>
> RACHEL: I thought [if I was to be able to buy fairly traded clothing] unless I spend £300 I am not going to get something I like, and I thought "I can probably manage without" and I quite like that feeling.

Feelings of efficacy and the image of the self as someone who has made, or at least tried to make, a difference and is therefore all the better for their consumption choices, fit in with Campbell's (1987) idea of hedonism as the basis for consumer desires. Campbell believes that both the senses and the emotions have to be stimulated to experience pleasure from consumption, and that constructing morally idealized self-images in day-dreams, to be fulfilled through consumption, form the root of that pleasure (1987: 213-214). I have reservations about the likelihood of dreaming of the self as "the great and the good" as a motivation for ethical consumerism; I do, however, believe that reflexively enjoying the feeling of being good is one of the positive gains of ethical consumerism.

The second strand of pleasure, that achieved through the surprising effects of paucity of choice, also contains echoes of Campbell's (1992) theory of consumer desires - that of the role of novelty. In general novelty is perceived as a drive of consumerism, through providing a consumer with a new canvas upon which they project their fantasies about self-fulfilment from consumption. Ethical consumerism, however, provides a re-working of the concept of novelty: having given up certain desirable products, the newly created ethical alternative provides immense pleasure for the consumer. The rewards for ethicality are at their greatest here, with those long lost treats restored to the ethical consumer (especially vegetarians and vegans), and enjoyed all the more for knowing what it is that has been missed. Instead of being a novelty in the strictest sense, a new ethical alternative is a return to novelty, and is less likely to prove to be the disappointment assumed to fuel conventional consumerism:

> LIZZIE: Heinz have just started doing baken beans with vegetarian sausages which everybody is so excited about it is ridiculous, and so I have suddenly started looking around that shelf again and thinking ohh what else can you get, you know. .... Marks and Spencer's tarte de citreon, we ate it once and then discovered it had gelatine in and I was really furious because it was delicious. That was five years ago and I spotted it in Marks and Spencer's the other day and they have made it vegetarian which really pleased me.

None of the stories of deprivation of choice should be taken as implying that the ethical consumer does not buy products which transgress their ethics out of sheer desire. Just as consumers are notorious for supplementing healthy diets with creamcakes, the ethical consumer lets themselves indulge in certain "treats". As one of the interviewees puts it "you can't have a conscience all the time, otherwise you couldn't be happy". Showing strong similarities with the interviewees in Miller's sample (1998), the ethical consumers described the treats they allowed themselves - generally cakes and sweets, or alcohol - which showed clearly that there were times when ethical thresholds were gladly (and surreptitiously) reached. Miller (1998: 48) sees a treat as an extravagant buy that frames all other shopping as mundane and other orientated. The ethical consumers' ideas of treats would easily fit in with this description, and moreover fit in with the cultural ideals of a treat as a sticky cream-cake or bar of chocolate. These naughty but nice products seemed to be the areas which the ethical consumers were lax about both because of an

overwhelming desire for the goods, and because they already stood outside the notion of "good", "sensible" shopping.

Arriving at Amy's house for the second interview she confessed to having just been shopping and buying lots of cakes containing ingredients outside her ethics. She said her first impulse had been to hide the cake, but then thought better of it in favour of an honest interview. This inevitably led to a frank discussion of the limits to ethical concerns:

> ME: You said you eat things like biscuits and cakes, is that where you slip, on the pleasure, where there is almost like naughtiness there?
>
> AMY: Yes, I think it is, isn't it. Because I like naughtiness, yes, definitely. My daughter and I always go out in term-time and we make sure we "squadgy [cake] and tea" and they have got to be as disgusting as possible. I have always enjoyed that. I have always enjoyed squadgy cakes, so yes, I slip up on the nice things. ... When you go to a tea place there is no list of ingredients on the piece of gateau that is there, so you don't know what you are eating, so yeah I go for what I fancy and enjoy it.

This pattern of treating the self was repeated across the consumers, both for ethical concerns and health concerns, and where the two meet. There is little doubt that a great deal of the pleasure to be derived from these "treats" came from the feeling of doing something "naughty", of breaking one's own rules. Whilst Amy had decided to be open about her sheer delight in being unethical and unhealthy, many of the consumers felt obliged to offer some form of defence of their actions, and tried to minimise either their involvement or the consequences. Here is another truly wonderful explanation of treats from Rachel and her husband:

> RACHEL: Frozen ice-cream, we buy that for two months in the summer for a treat. And we are not going to buy the junk ice-cream any more because it is rubbish ...
>
> Peter: Give away words on the lid "frozen dessert", rather than ice-cream.
>
> RACHEL: So, we will go back to buying the quality ice-creams which are more expensive, but that is because they are made with fresh ingredients, but they probably still have additives in, but it is a treat.
>
> ME: So you eat ice-cream, but not dairy products?

RACHEL: That's right, this is my blip, my treat. I mean I haven't had one ice-cream out, I have had one this summer, I mean some people probably have one every other day or something. These are like, I allow myself from time to time ice-cream when it is very hot. It is a treat, but it is probably going to be twice a week when it is hot, which is allowing myself quite a lot of treats, but I am not eating other sweet things like biscuits and cakes.

|

Peter: I think that everything we do is tinged with pragmatism and we are not obsessive about things, and the whole process I suppose could be described as one of mitigation.

|

RACHEL: So we have a sort of core stock of things and then we have treats.

A whole variety of things come before ethical consumerism on the list of consumer priorities: the claims of family, shortage of money and the absolute necessity to have an efficient product. These are all accepted as reasonable grounds for placing the needs of the local above the individual before the claims of distant others. However, when it comes to the consumer straight-forwardly desiring a product not in-keeping with their ethics, and therefore with no justification available to the ethical consumer for the product's purchase, the partial nature of knowledge across the commodity chain comes in handy as an excuse. Cherry, the radical environmental activist, railed against the impacts of transnationals throughout her interviews, and especially *Coca-Cola* who she saw as one of the worst offenders. She at first claimed she would never drink their product because of this, then admitted that she loved *Coca-Cola,* and saw it as something special, her personal treat. She added:

CHERRY: If I ever buy a can of *Coca-Cola* it will be on my own, it won't be with any of my friends. I'm sure that, well I'm not sure at all actually. I don't know enough about *Coca-Cola* as a company to know who they shit on, and my dad's just got back from Australia and said that the Aborigines in the National Park were performing to the tourists and he got to talking to them and discovered that they were sponsored by *Coca-Cola.*

From having previously accused *Coca-Cola* of destroying rainforests and paying their workers very low wages, Cherry now uses the uncertainties prevalent in the global market to free her from her already ackowledged duty of avoiding *Coke.* The interview took place prior to the said Aborigines being used as part of *Coca-Cola's* marketing campaign, and I imagine Cherry has to be more cynical about the good

intentions of the sponsorship now. However, more generally the contradiction of the shifts between boycott and happy consumption has long fascinated me with regards to ethical consumerism - I have to confess it was the contradiction of vegans having such a radical pattern of consumption, and yet drinking *Guinness* (well known in ethical consumer circles for containing fish) that was one of the things that intrigued me enough to persue a PhD in ethical consumerism in the first place. So I asked Jane, the first vegan I interviewed, what she tended to drink in the pub and she told me it was *Guinness* - admitting that she knew it was not vegan. In the next interview she returned to the subject:

> JANE: Actually we were laughing about that *Guinness*. All this weekend we seemed to be drinking *Guinness.* All vegans, well not all vegans, some vegans, and I was saying to my friend Doris, who is a member of the Vegan Society, and we were saying that God, we hadn't really thought about the drink thing so much, but other vegans would be really strict on that. We know that there is one can or the bottle that is, but we haven't even bothered to look it up, so we are obviously not that bothered about it. So we've been thinking about that, but if there wasn't a label on it, and I wasn't absolutely sure I would possibly have it. Like there were these chocolate doughnuts where [my daughter] goes for her dance class and you know they were just at the corner in the bakery and I could not resist. And I quite enjoyed eating that cos I had no idea what was in it.

So for products an individual desperately wants to consume it is helpful to be able to disconnect from the impacts of that consumption. Therefore, not having a list of ingredients allows the consumer the extra room to locate themselves within the uncertainties created by the gaps in consumer knowledge. Alongside this repositioning of the self as an uninformed consumer, comes the placing of the self as a small cog in a vast commodity system:

> JANE: I think it's just the reason I'm doing it is to avoid the animal cruelty and I know that one little thing isn't going to make any difference. Right, but I am also doing it as a consumer and I know it is a very small difference. I'm only doing it for my conscience I suppose, so in those cases I'm not bothered about a tiny bit of that in my system and I know it is not going to make a huge difference.

At the point at which the consumer no longer wishes to consume ethically then, this narrative of making little or no difference anyway was a common occurrence. In contradistinction to arguments in the last chapter about an empowered ethical consumer impacting on the commodity chain through their choices, the consumer

now sees action as irrelevant because it has such a minimal impact in the first place. This pattern of justification only appeared when the consumer was unable to explain her actions through "reasonable" thresholds to action.

Negotiating ethics in space and place

It is impossible to examine behaviour outside of context, and indeed the ethical consumers spent a considerable time explaining the differences in ease and difficulty of being an ethical consumer in certain spaces. In this section I will look at the effects of context and ethic on the consumer's desire for consistency or to appear to others as consistent, whilst at the same time having to constantly negotiate social and spatial constraints. I have taken four different, although highly generalised, locations to examine the change in behavioural practices, namely home, work, eating out, and eating at friends, thereby moving the analysis away from the limitations of single sites of consumption (Jackson and Thrift, 1995: 211). The emphasis is mainly placed on food because the consumers' narratives outside the home purely concentrated upon that one product area, as though none of the other areas were consumed, or required any ethical consumption, in any other space than the home.

Women are rarely seen as having complete control, even in their own homes. Academics have regularly recognised the gendered segregation of the undertaking of household duties. Shopping is viewed as a female skill (Jackson and Holbrook, 1995: 1925, Lupton, 1996: 39), and women are far more likely to cook than men (Warde and Hetherington, 1994: 759, Murcott, 1995: 92). However, few of my interviewees lived in nuclear families and of those who did only Cath still had young children. Out of all the ethical consumers for whom household negotiations, in terms of partner or children, could be seen as applicable only Cath did the majority of the shopping or the cooking. The rest of the interviewees were quick to point out that their partners, or grown up children, took an equal share of the cooking and shopping chores. Much of this was due to the ill health of ethical consumers in families, such as Pam and Amy who said that they found shopping especially tiring. However, for those with no health problems, there was a clear understanding of the need to endorse their alternative (and more politically correct) lifestyles with an image of an empowered female within the home[8]. So Julie was quick to justify her

[8] See *'In defense of shopping'* (Douglas 1997) for a fuller debate about the links between attitudes within the home to attitudes in general.

reasons for always doing the cooking, and some of the ethical consumers emphasised the role of their partners by stressing that they were the more capable chef:

> JULIE: We have a division of labour. John is in charge of tidiness and I am in charge of nature. Cooking comes under nature, washing up comes under tidiness, that sort of thing.
>
> LESLEY: Andy cooks more than I do. Mostly the cooking we do is sort of chopping it up and putting it into a pan or whatever, but Andy does it more creatively than me. He likes lots of spices and things like that.
>
> RACHEL: I suppose we take it in turns [to cook] and do about half each roughly.
>
> Peter: You do the bigger half then!
>
> RACHEL: Yes, but if Peter cooks he is a bit more adventurous than me, and you might get a sauce or something more exotic, whereas I am really not interested in creating washing up and I am really not interested in cooking very much, so I will make salads and pasta-ry things. Whereas Peter will make some strange sauce with mustard, or something that is very bad for you and I will be forced into eating it.

Annabel's household was particularly unusual, in terms of the relationships of the members (her sister, her son and her mother all resided with her), their democratic attitude to household chores (all shared tasks equally, as a consensual decision with no pressure) and their general agreement as to the food eaten. As all held roughly the same ethical opinions, the menu for the week was drawn up in advance, and then the members of the household would take it in turns to shop, cook and clean. This may not appear on the surface to be an extraordinary set-up, but it was the only household across the sample which had such unanimous agreements on all subjects. More often the decisions taken within the household were a question of negotiation, compromise or the agreement to disagree and buy multiple products. All of which, however, showed that every household revealed "...a particular and unique culture which provides the basis for the security and identity of the household or family as a whole, as well as that of its individual members" (Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley, 1992: 18), and thereby displayed the moral economy of the household.

Many of the ethical consumers had permanent partners who shared similar thoughts on ethical values. However, this is not to say that even those who claim

that one of the reasons that you develop a partnership is the sharing of common beliefs agreed totally on the best way to put those beliefs into action. Pam, whose husband has strong development concerns, but a far more Marxist and revolutionary interpretation of his ethics, talks about the difficulties she has experienced trying to negotiate an ethical position within the household which accounts for the values of both partners (and the now grown children). As everyone shops and cooks she has no direct means of imposing certain foods:

> PAM: I have wanted not to have beef in the house, because it is the most inefficient food in terms of the conversion food value to the amount of grain, but it was only with BSE I was able to enforce it quite frankly. I mean up until that time we still had, chilli-con-carne is one of our basics and of course that was cheap, but my husband likes to make stews and he likes to make beef stews, and I prefer lamb stew on ethical grounds. But after BSE I put my foot down and said I didn't want beef in the house and I hope I can keep it down.

Pam's story represents the two individuals negotiating, and ultimately hoping to force, an acceptable position. This differs from the situation so often represented by academics studying household duties, who point out that men and children often have a greater say over food choices that the woman of the household (Delphy, 1995: 34, Mennell et al, 1992: 108).

Whilst some households agreed a compromise position to share meals, other households were unable to come to a mutual agreement and ate separately, or had two lots of shampoo or even three different types of milk. There were a number of households where the two partners or the older children held different tastes and ethics, or felt it only fair occasionally to treat their young children to products that they would be unwilling to buy for themselves. As these differences in tastes or ethics could not be resolved into a mutual position, the households decided to purchase multiple varieties of commodities. Here is how three households resolve their health, belief and taste differences (as well as personal niggles) by buying multiple types of milk:

> RACHEL: I, myself, don't eat dairy products except a little bit of cows milk in coffee, so I have soya milk ... We have a computerised list of things that we generally buy all the time. And it is very silly because this is Peter's milk, milkp, and I am soya milk, milkr.

CATH: My husband has started having soya milk in his tea or coffee [along with daughter who has milk allergy], but I hate it. I am sorry, but I hate soya milk. I will have black coffee, but tea, I really love my tea in the morning, it just tastes so bizarre. I have cut back, but I don't think I could cut it out altogether.

AMY: My husband has either soya milk or this *Lima 3* which is delicious. I usually have goats milk. My daughter drinks [skimmed milk].
|
ME: Sorry, why is this milk thing, why is everybody drinking different milk?
|
AMY: Because that is what we like. I like this *Lima 3,* but he annoys me because it is three different milks. There is soya, rice and oat mixed together, and if you don't shake it you get the heavy dark oat left in the bottom. And he pours the nice rice milk and has this nice breakfast, and then I come along and there is all this heavy stuff in the bottom and I say "You didn't shake this up at all". Whereas if you had ordinary milk you wouldn't have all these irritations.

It seems likely that I did not obtain the whole story about the processes of compromise and the tensions caused by ethical consumerism within families. It became startlingly apparent to me as I analysed the transcripts that the ethical consumers who had partners with opposing beliefs said nothing about disagreements over the raising of the children, and I think that this would provide an interesting area for further research. Moreover, I was told several unsolicited stories about huge family arguments about what was eaten at Christmas, and although literature regularly points to shared meals as a point of conflict at Christmas (Lofgren, 1993: 218, Lupton, 1996: 63, Charles, 1995: 105) it seems unlikely that the subjects of the arguments had no premise outside of that moment in time.

The transcripts of the consumers then built up a complex pattern of compromise or of the agreement to purchase multiple products. The consumer obviously tries to negotiate a position where she is allowed a high degree of control in the practice of her ethics, and home is the place where the most committed acts of ethical consumerism are undertaken. Negotiating with the family or flat mates however means that there may well be products within the house to which the consumer objects, especially (and almost paradoxically) when partners and children take some of the responsibility for the cooking and shopping. This can then cause problems for the consumer in terms of appearing to be a consistent ethical

consumer, especially as the home is not as Saunders suggests "... where people are off-stage, free from surveillance, in control of their immediate environment" (Saunders cited in Valentine, 1998: 320). Pam told me that every so often when her husband or one of her children goes shopping they bring home a jar of *Nescafé*, much to her annoyance:

> PAM: I know how angry I get when I see a jar of *Nestlé* product on the table. I immediately rip the label off and then [my family] say I am being hypocritical.

Earlier in the interview Pam had talked about the need for "internal consistency", which she explained as being equivalent to integrity, and it was clear that the notion of consistency for Pam was often informed by the surveillance of ethical others[9]. Billig (1989: 192) in his theorisation of rhetoric suggests that rather than the inconsistencies between belief and action being the root of the problem, it is the internal and external criticisms stemming from inconsistency which make us feel obliged to offer justifications for our actions. In the case of the ethical consumers it is necessary to appear consistent both to a community with shared values, and to protect the self from the critical comments of those with opposing beliefs. This desire to appear consistent continues even when the consumer recognises the reasonableness of their inconsistencies, as in the case of another family member purchasing an unethical product. Pam's defense of her consumption practices in what is ostensibly "private" space was repeated across the interviewees:

> CATH: ... 20 years ago we bought some mahogany bathroom fittings, we have still got them. Luckily most people don't realise, they don't think about it. Anyone who is a little bit environmental I have to apologise to before they go up there.
>
> MARY: Yeah, I feel really quite bad about [buying Radion]. I feel just a bit ashamed of myself. Spouting off to my friends "buy this" and then I just [buy conventional washing powder].

Once outside the home consistency is judged by completely different standards, reflecting the lack of opportunity to perform ethical consumerism in public space. Cleaning products, and to a large extent personal hygiene products, have little

[9] Pam regularly mentioned that she was less ethically committed in her purchases now that she was no longer working for the Quakers, and told stories about other Quakers asking her about her new clothes, which she immediately sent back to the retailer, opting to buy fair trade clothes instead.

relevance outside of the home, and so the narratives are mainly involved with food - a product area which is not just frequently consumed outside the home, but has a high degree of visibility. By necessity eating out requires that the ethical consumers be "easier" on themselves, asking fewer questions about the ingredients and sources of the food they are purchasing. There are real structural problems which force the consumer to choose certain products they would avoid having in their own home - it is simply not possible to exert the same controls in the public domain that one can in private. This may appear to be self-explanatory, but beneath the obviousness of the statement, some more profound reasonings of behaviour are happening. Ethical consumerism as performed by my interviewees was largely restricted to the choice of location: it must be remembered that no self-respecting ethical consumer would frequent *McDonalds* (at least in principle). Apart from the choice of eatery it was only vegetarianism and veganism that were continued with any constancy in the public arena[10]. That this should be the case has become so acceptable it is easy to miss the significance of the phenomenon. To understand more fully the unreflexively coded behaviour that it demonstrates though, I have include an extended section from Mary's transcript:

ME: What if you were out somewhere, would that bother..?
|
MARY: If it wasn't organic? No, it wouldn't.
|
ME: What about the coffee if you were out?
|
MARY: Well, I wouldn't, if they had it in the shop I would go for [the fair trade] one, but they don't most of the time, so if I'm out I'll drink whatever.
|
ME: Why do you not, this sounds silly, is that just for ease or what?
|
MARY: Well a lot of it is just like if you are in a cafe or restaurant say, if you say "Oh have you got this fair trade coffee?" and they'd just look at you like, you know. So most of the time it is not available.
|
ME: Right, what about something like soya marg, I mean if you were..?
|
MARY: Oh yeah, if I was out I just can't eat, I mean if I go into a cafe I have to ask them not to put butter or whatever on my bread if they give me a sandwich, or whatever..
|
ME: Okay, so why's that? I mean is that because it's easier to remain vegan when you are out than to buy organic, or because you feel it

[10] And Keanes and Willets (1995) found that if vegetarians broke their ethics then it was generally done outside the home - although this was not mentioned by my interviewees.

more important to stay vegan than to keep buying organic things when you are out, or why?

MARY: Um, its because I'm a vegan and I can't eat it. I mean I can drink coffee whether it is organic or not, I know it is better if I drink organic, but it is not going to interfere with my diet.

So for Mary, eating organic or fair trade food does not constitute a diet, a regime, or any form of ritual: whereas eating vegan food is an absolute - she simply "can't eat" anything else. That she found my questioning so bizarre, and her own answers so straightforward, shows quite how powerfully the acceptance of an intransigent vegan ethic by both the ethical and conventional consumer has acted in constructing behavioural patterns. The ethic has become so embodied that it would be necessary to undertake a highly considered act of conversion to allow Mary to break her coded behaviour, underlining why I have called vegetarian and veganism identity ethics. In common with the rest of the consumers, this means that only her inability to eat animal products limits her lifestyle in any way. All other ethics are contingent upon the freedom to be ethical, and are apparently free from external criticisms of inconsistency. For the vegetarians, the large grassroots vegetarian movement has ensured that it makes good business sense for cafes and restaurants to offer vegetarian alternatives, and most people claimed that eating out was no longer a problem. For the vegans however, the decision to remove all animal substances from their diet has definite limitations:

JANE: Restaurants are more difficult. You really have to select where you are going. Yeah, probably going out for me is quite difficult. I just end up going out to Indians all the time, which is brilliant, but um..

Despite her obvious desire to portray veganism as a pleasant lifestyle choice, Jane has to admit that it makes certain areas of life almost impossible. Lisa finds that eating out as a vegan has more possibilities than those stated by Jane, and can include Thai and Pizza without the cheese - in fact Lisa goes as far as to state that there is no problem eating out. However, eating out as an expression of the self (Finkelstein, 1989: 4) becomes reduced to the self as an ethical being, as opposed to the whole range of values and desires which can be performed through an unlimited choice of eating locations. It comes as little surprise then that for ease and enjoyment of practice, ethical consumers felt their consumer values were not imperative when part of the "captured market" (Wrigley and Lowe, 1996: 26).

Notions of the captured market may be limited to airports or motorway services for conventional consumers, but for the ethical consumer it represents the majority of public places. Indeed, if the consumer did not relax their ethics, consuming would become an impossibility in the public domain. To demonstrate the structural barriers to ethical consumerism inherent in cafes and restaurants, here is an example provided by Ruby, who due to environmental illness has to avoid all pesticides and toxic chemicals including candles:

> RUBY: It is very difficult because the rest of the world doesn't live the way I do. And um, so in order for me to go places and do things, you know, sometimes I can't be places because they have candles. Restaurants, I can't eat in them anyway, but I can't even sit in them and talk with my friends ... It is very limiting and frustrating and limits my social life significantly.

I asked the interviewees if they were aware of anywhere to eat which sold either organic or fair trade food, and only Cath knew of an organic restaurant. The lack of eateries catering for the ethical consumer compels the individual to limit much of the performance of their ethical values to the home, unless they wish to become as restricted in their movements as Ruby. Whilst there are small things that the consumer can do to overcome the structural barriers to ethical consumerism, such as Rachel eating only vegetarian food when she is out, so that she does not have to eat meat which is not organic, for the majority of fair trade and environmental issues, the restaurant industry simply offers no solutions. Whether, as the number of people concerned about organic food and fair trade increases, there will eventually be a corresponding rise of businesses addressing those issues remains to be seen. However, as the ethical consumer displays little of the constancy associated with animal welfare ethics for any other ethic, it is impossible to know whether they would transfer their loyalties to environmentally friendly, fair trading eateries if they were no longer constrained to eat in conventional restaurants by being part of a captured market.

Eating at somebody else's house effectively represents another form of a captured market. Accepting this fact, the ethical consumers who had no animal welfare diet spoke about the reasons why someone else's cooking did not create a qualm of conscience:

> PAM: If you are at somebody's house and they offer you a cup of coffee then there are other factors other than whether or not it is Traidcraft coffee that comes into play, and one of them is being gracious to the person that is feeding you and things. And you know there are other things which come into account.
>
> RACHEL: And eating with friends, whatever they give me I would eat. I wouldn't make an issue out of it, unless I can choose what I would have, but I would not impose my values on them. If they ask me if I am vegetarian I would say yes.

As Telfer (1996: 22) suggests, there are other ethics which precede certain consumer ethics in priority of sanctity. The most obvious explanation for the eat-what-you-are-given attitude of the interviewees is the primacy of grace[11]. Being gracious to a hostess is both a scripted form of civility, so socialised that at times it is likely to be unreflexively performed (Finkelstein, 1989)[12], and a more conscious realisation of the necessity to place people's feelings above personal values. It is unlikely that any hostess would understand a request for organically grown food to be served at a table, especially when it is purely a question of personal beliefs about the rights and wrongs of environmental and health issues. More understood are the relatively circumscribed and strictly policed vegetarian and vegan ethics, accepted by meat eaters as less transgressable than other consumer ethics. This is why Rachel, above, says that she will tell hostesses that she is vegetarian even though she is not, so that she does not have to eat non-organic meat. The vegetarians felt that things had become a lot easier in this country over the last few years, with most people willing and able to cook vegetarian food, but they still felt bad about putting people out. Those with an animal welfare diet talked about how touched they were by the huge amount of effort that friends regularly made to accommodate their ethics. Of all the impositions though, the most nightmarish scenario was accompanying someone who had failed to tell the hostess that their partner was a vegetarian:

> LESLEY: When I first started going out with my husband, I was taken to this friend's house and he thought this friend was vegetarian so he did not bother telling her that I was, and then she presented me with this

[11] I have used the term "primacy of grace" quite deliberately, as I suggest that the implied moral value is one which is more embodied than the majority of consumer values (animal welfare diets withstanding), and therefore precedes the performance of other ethics at an unconscious level, as opposed to holding greater priority in any reflexively determined sense.

[12] Finkelstein and Bauman (1993: 80) see these socialised moralities as devoid of any personal ethical reasoning, and therefore devoid of real moral substance.

> fish, cos of course she was vegetarian, but she still ate fish. And that was really awkward because I didn't know her and I didn't want to offend her. But I mean I did tell her that I didn't eat fish, and quite surprisingly she was a bit off about it.
>
> LIZZIE: [I had gone to my partner's parents for a meal, and he had not told them that I was vegetarian, so when his mother served up the meal it was chops]. His mum was dishing up and she just turned to me, and she said afterwards that she didn't know what made her say it, "Do you eat meat" and I went "no" ... It must have been the desperation in my face, and it was great. She said "I'll give you double helpings of vegetables, is that all right?, and I just thought "Great. No 'bloody hell I'll have to make an omelette'." She just didn't care, you know, just extra vegetables, salad and bread... and it was like "oh thank God, no fuss". It was wonderful.

Having an animal welfare ethic which has been transformed into a clear set of behaviours makes the consumer less willing to act in opposition to her beliefs, even in circumstances where there is little choice available. So the animal welfarists felt unable to eat meat even though they were aware of breaking social codes, and felt personally uncomfortable with the situation. As well as feeling embarassed about causing difficulties for the hostess when she has been uninformed of dietary choices, the ethical consumers were unhappy about offending a hostess who has gone out of her way to cook a vegetarian meal, but has failed to comprehend the minutiae of the regime:

> SUSY: I don't know if you would consider this to be a lapse, but say for example that someone is cooking something and it has a chicken stock in it and they say it's vegetarian, and then "oh no, but it has got chicken stock in, you don't mind do you?", and I am like "oh, ah, oh, ah". But chicken stock, if they had tried to be vegetarian then I don't mind.
>
> LIZZIE: But it is really difficult, things like vegetarian cheese you know, people have really gone out of their way to cook for you and taken their time. If people have gone out of their way to cook vegetarian and there is normal cheese in it I just have to grin and bear it. And it is very hypocritical really, because I mean eating non-vegetarian cheese is the same as eating meat. If someone put a slab of meat in front of me I would say "oops, sorry, no", but because it is made with non-vegetarian, because you can't see it, it is much easier to go "oh thanks".

The vegetarians expressed themselves as willing to relax their ethical behaviours to a greater or lesser extent, depending strongly on the strength of their ethics or their ability to distanciate themselves from the animal which has been cooked. Lizzie, who was very strict about her vegetarianism, would eat cheese, but it is

unlikely that she would have eaten anything with chicken stock in even though she wanted not to offend the hostess. There is then a negotiation between the consumer's ethical positioning and the primacy of grace. Inevitably, as with all other negotiations, each individual will have different priorities and ethical thresholds, but for the consumers I interviewed eating at others represented the greatest level of negotiation.

The notion of the primacy of grace is an important one for understanding ethical consumerism. I would argue that, apart from the odd debates with conventional consumers about appropriate behaviour, ethical consumerism is a polite revolution. It is the revolution of the perennial optimist, who believes that change can be achieved not just bloodlessly, but hopefully without really upsetting anybody along the way. It matters to the ethical consumer that the ethics they pursue are those which society as a whole condones, even if the action is abhorred - ensuring that the lack of understanding which surrounds the consumer's behaviour is due to the hypocrisy of society, rather than the confused morality of the individual. And whilst much of the efficacy and enjoyment of ethical consuming comes from remaining in the forefront of the consumer movement, holding marginal ideas about appropriate behaviour, it remains an objective of the ethical consumer to secure action with the minimal negative impact on conventional consumers.

The final site I want to look at is the workplace. Whilst Sack claims that there was a lack of control over consumption practices in the workplace (Sack, 1992: 155), he along with other theorists accept that work is an important area for the fulfilment of life projects (Du Gay, 1997, Casey, 1995). In order to fulfil a life project in which ethical values hold such a prominent position, most of the ethical consumers were involved in some form of related work. For those ethical consumers whose work fell outside of any ethical field, it appeared that the desire for ethical continuity meant that they tried hard to introduce certain practices in the office. Recycling was an obvious example, and probably easily understood and accepted by the rest of the organisation, as it involves little compromise on the part of colleagues. Furthermore, the workplace has often been a target of campaigns to introduce more ethical and environmental practices, ensuring that it is viewed as a space open to ethical conversion. This explains Annabel's assertion that she can still do her bit in the office. At present a new scheme is afoot, backed by Clare Short and

the Co-op bank, trying to persuade secretaries to change the office coffee to fairly traded coffee (Saunders, 23-11-1998). As several of the ethical consumers mentioned that they had negotiated with their work mates in order to change office coffee away from Nescafé it seems likely that the scheme may well prove to be effective, at least in reinforcing the ethical consumer's belief that the workplace holds ethical possibilities.

Lesley was unique amongst the interviewees. She had a job which caused her immense problems in trying to unite her working self and her consumer self. As a nurse, the discourse of an ethic of care suffused her work identity. However, the practices involved in delivering that care ensured that several of her personal ethics became confusingly unworkable:

> LESLEY: I am still exploiting animals for part of my job really, and I can never see [that changing] unless I change jobs. That is why I wouldn't describe myself as alternative ... because the drugs are animal tested. And also as part of my work, but related to using resources and things, that for all the treatments we have, it is all plastic and all used once. So at home I am buying things that I know I can recycle or refill or whatever, whereas at work in many ways I am acting as a totally separate person, you know, totally different person cos I am throwing out all these plastics and stuff.

Rather than successfully operating through a range of ways to practice her values, Lesley found that she was unable to unite the notion of a caring work identity with her desire to exercise consistent ethical consumerism. Psychological theories would see her dissonance limited by changing her beliefs about ethical practice to fit in with her job (Festinger, 1957). Or perhaps if the work had in itself been in contradiction to Lesley's ethics, or she had had difficulties in uniting two social identities, she could simply have changed her job or her ethics to reduce dissonance[13]. Lesley tried to reduce the inconsistencies in her behaviour by introducing shemes to send used medical equipment to the Third World, but the scheme proved unworkable. She describes the realities of acting in opposition to her environmental and animal welfare ethics in order to relieve human suffering as making it harder for her to once again step back into her role as an ethical consumer:

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[13] In her survey looking at the practices of consumption across spaces and their meanings for identity Harbottle (1998) found that vegetarians in her sample had changed jobs or ethics to achieve continuity in the face of identity dissonance and criticism.

> LESLEY: You are kind of having to do [things in opposition to your ethics], so at some times you are trying not to think of things. So say I have been at work all day, and then dashed around the shops to buy something, I might not be so thoughtful as I had been on a day off.

It is impossible to understand whether Lesley's perceptions of appropriate ethical behaviour have begun to become a little bit smudged at the edges after practising contradictory ethics all day, or whether this simply shows the difficulties attached to what is assumed to be the smooth switch between different identity performances. Either way, it demonstrates that the change of behaviour over various contexts is representative of the necessary negotiations of structural constraints, rather than values themselves being affected by context. Those theorists who believe in a reductionism to a purely contextual self have, as suggested in particular by Greenwood (1994), failed to appreciate the inflexibility of personal values. That those values may be preceded by other, and more embodied values, such as the primacy of grace is not in doubt. That the performance of those values has to be negotiated, at times becoming almost impossible, due to certain contextual constraints may show that the ethic does not represent an absolute. But it does not mean that the individual does not still hold that ethic even as they act to transgress it - too much effort is put into trying for constancy to suggest that it is a meaningless concept in a post-modern, depthless society where membership necessitates a loss of all permanence of being.

Summary

The areas of contingency that I have addressed in this chapter show that there are many similarities in behavioural patterns related to the consumer's commitment to their ethics, as well as the negation of the consumer ethic by other priorities. For some consumers inconvenience was a factor that they felt should not be regarded, while for others it made ethical consumerism an impossibility. This pattern was repeated across the contingents to choice: whilst most of the consumers found that their baser desires got the better of them at times, others would find ethical laxity for a cake unforgivable. What is constructed over the chapter is a picture of the individuality of the consumer, with every consumer having a different set of thresholds and priorities which thrust the everyday into the ethical, making or breaking ethical action. Absolutes were few and far between when values

intercepted, but for the most determined of the ethical consumers, at a personal level those absolutes did still exist.

Chapter Six - Everyday negotiations in the construction of an ethical self

Introduction

I shall use this concluding chapter to bring together the sets of stories told by the interviewees in a summary of my arguments about the construction and negotiation of consumer ethics. I shall suggest the implications of the findings for the understandings of geography of ethics, the geography of commodities and for identity theories. I accept that it is impossible to generalise about the ethical consumers that I interviewed. To begin with, it is clear that not all of the ethical consumers were motivated by ethical concerns. Instead, at least one of the consumers was an ethical consumer purely out of health concerns. Other consumers mixed health concerns with concern for distant others. The interviewees used ethical consumerism differently in their construction of a sense of self, or for the purposes of display. Moreover, every consumer had their own individual set of consumer concerns and patterns of appropriate consumer actions. Finally, not all of the interviewees demonstrated the same level of consistency in their consumer choices, and every interviewee had their own particular barriers to ethical consumption. However, this study of ethical consumers, of ethics in action, has revealed insights into areas of academic concern which are worthy of note. Therefore, with the differences between the interviewees duly acknowledged, I shall present my conclusions on geography and ethics.

Geography and ethical responsibility

I want to begin this discussion about ethical responsibility and distant others from what may at first appear to be an unusual starting point. In the empirical chapters I suggested that every interviewee had a personally constructed set of appropriate ethical actions. Although I used notions of absolutes, thresholds and priorities as a heuristic device throughout the empirical chapters, I wish now to amend this categorisation. Absolutes and thresholds were helpful for demonstrating that some ethical values were stronger than others, and that there was a limit to ethical behaviour. However, they could also be seen as suggesting a formal hierarchy to consumer ethics, which is far too structural in its presentation of the ethical self. Instead I wish to suggest that ethical values could be better understood as a set of flexible priorities. These priorities are not equal in their importance to the consumer,

as can be seen from the consumers' assertions that they favour fair trade over animal welfare, or the environment over fair trade. More importantly however, these ethical priorities are not equal in their performance. So whereas a consumer may believe that the environment has priority over animal welfare, an animal welfare ethic in the form of vegetarianism may well ensure that the consumer will refuse meat where they would happily accept non-organic vegetables. Therefore, the nature of the expected performance of the ethic is key to understanding consumer behaviour.

To explain further, I shall recap on the construction of ethics and appropriate actions, and thus begin to pull apart any simple relationship between ethics and action. In Chapter Four I looked at ethics through their genealogy to present a picture of culturally constructed ethical practices which are personally negotiated to produce individual patterns of action. Hence, although fair trade has its roots in Marxist philosophy, the ethical consumers had established their fair trade ethic through Westernised, and often Christian, beliefs in justice and fairness. Fair trade is closely linked to charity giving, with the majority of the interviewees only purchasing one or two fairly traded products. So whereas the fair trade ethic has a relatively simple I-thou structure of responsibility, it has little identity or lifestyle commitment, no culturally produced set of actions outside of a system of support. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the only interviewees who regularly purchased a variety of fair trade products were those who had developed their fair trade ethics through church links. Here fair trade becomes more consistent through the development of an identity commitment.

For animal welfare concerns the relationship between consumer and ethical "other" is once again structured as a clear I-thou relationship. However, the relationship resulted in a variety of ethical actions, which did not necessarily correspond with the consumers' own ethical formulations. The two culturally constructed patterns of action which produced the greatest consistency of practice were vegetarianism and veganism. These two patterns of action could be viewed as identity ethics, and are subject to high levels of surveillance. This along with the ease of connection between consumer and consumed rendered the animal welfare ethic the most consistently practised ethic. The complexities of global environmental problems however, ensure that environmental concern is subject to high levels of mediation.

The need for expert knowledge to aid the construction of appropriate actions ensures that global environmental ethics are unlikely to be personally derived. This has led to a unity between ethics and actions in the form of system ethic-actions. Whilst some consumers had adopted a lifestyle through the down-shifting philosophy, the majority of the interviewees had a set of system ethic-actions: buying recycled paper, Ecover and organic produce being their main environmental practices. Environmental concern demonstrates a plurality of subject positions, of which a clear I-thou relationship or the Me-it relationship of risk perception proved to be the most effective positionalities for ethical responsibility.

There are two implications of these ethical formulations for consumer actions. Firstly, what becomes clear is that for ethical consumption, the genealogy of the ethic has an impact on the constancy of the performance. By genealogy I mean the culturally specific history of the ethic which gives the ethic meaning for the ethical consumer self and thereby suggests forms of action are the most appropriate. So whereas Taylor's (1989) framework of ethics and orientation to the good could be seen as useful for understanding the original up-take of the ethic, in the performance far more is at stake. How an ethic is embodied is of real relevance. The identity ethic of vegetarianism is thus more likely to be productive of consistent behaviour than the complex system ethic-actions of environmentalism. Furthermore, when we consider ethical values and moral codes outside of these narrowly defined consumer ethics, further comprehension of the role of ethical genealogy in determining consistency becomes clear. Take for example the primacy of grace, which is capable of limiting even the performance of vegetarianism, although I shall say more about this later. What appears when we consider the genealogy of the ethic, is a far deeper understanding of contextual behaviour than Rorty's belief in a plurality of ethical selves. Hence, it becomes possible to comprehend the inconsistencies of consumer actions, without denying the existence of a more permanent set of ethical priorities. Moreover, we can begin to account for the predictability of the ethical consumer, of the limitations of their practices, and the unequal performances of the three ethics under investigation.

This is not, however, to suggest that the only factors limiting ethical consumption are ethical. Chapter Five showed that a variety of contingencies have to be negotiated in everyday life. It becomes obvious that the ethical consumer is purely

a consumer who takes ethics into account when they shop. They are no more morally capable than the conventional shopper, and they are not engaged on an ascetic life course. Thus the temptations of cakes, alcohol and *Coca-Cola* produce a pleasurable interlude from ethical consumerism. However, these temptations, which the consumer is aware have little reasonable justification (other than sheer desire) highlight a further aspect in the relationship to an "ethical other" - the ability of the consumer to distanciate themselves from the relationship. Whereas bacon sandwiches are normally viewed as the irresistible treat in popular imaginings of vegetarianism, the interviewees spoke of their lapses as in general being the areas where they could disassociate themselves from an animal. The less a product was recognisably related to an animal, the more likely the vegans and vegetarians were to consume it both for pleasure, and through the primacy of grace. However, this is not to say that the consumer is not capable of disassociating themselves from even an obvious "ethical other", denying the importance of actions or knowledge of outcomes. Jane and her justifications for drinking *Guinness* represent an example of this. Thus any consumer ethic is always dependent upon an imaginary relationship to the other, or a perceived fear, just as the ability to transgress the ethic is dependent upon dismissing the impact of self on other, or other on self. The second implication of ethical formulations, therefore, is the actual construction of the relationship to "ethical other". The greater the clarity of the relationship between self and other, and the greater the ability to determine that abstention would have positive impacts on the "ethical other" (or indeed on the self in the case of risk perception), then the greater the likelihood of action.

So to summarise, the implications of ethical formulations - both in terms of the clarity of the relationship between self and other, and the genealogy of the ethic - have an impact on the consistency of consumer action. The one through highlighting the links between action and outcome, the other through establishing appropriate actions. It should be clear by now, that I concur with Smith (1998) that caring for a distant other requires both empathy and reason. An ability to empathise with a distant other, or an emotive response to environmental destruction, are far more likely to result in action than a simple acceptance that, if viewed from a standpoint of an ethic of justice, we have a duty to purchase fair trade products. At the same time, without a more reasoned explanation of the need to care for the environment, an empathy with an other has little force. However,

before we begin the rush to provide the consumers with the ethic and the empathy, let us return to where this thesis began - the disparity between reported concern and consumer action. Is it rational to assume that the majority of consumers (those 86% who welcomed fair trade, the 90% who placed ethics as a priority in their shopping) are lacking the knowledge of an other which would promote action? Or is it more realistic to assume that empathy does not necessarily equate to the freedom to be ethical?

Ethical consumerism is caught up with negative identity connotations, and discourses of denial, expense and inconvenience. It was clear from the consumers' explanations of "becoming" that the choice to act is rarely a question of holding information about the impacts of their actions. Instead, they were related to notions of what it is good to be, linked to the influence of admired role models, religion, family and cultural communities. These ethics and actions are chosen from an aporia of ethical positions because they have meaning for the self. So whereas Bauman (1993) uses Levinas' theory of asymmetrical I-thou, self for other, to suggest that face-to-face responsibility is a pre-social morality, I am using it to argue that responsibility for a distant other has its roots very much in the social. Consumer responsibility is neither an ethical imposition nor a pre-social morality. It requires an understanding that notions of the good are rarely achieved outside of a cultural context. It is not sufficient, therefore, to produce an ethical philosophy and provide the knowledge of the other, without creating the social conditions which would allow the freedom to undertake ethical actions.

This understanding of the need to place ethics in a cultural context should, of course, be key to the formulation of ethical responsibility, particularly in geography. Geographers have been keen to point out the difference that space and place make to social and ethical norms, contributing to the long running debate about the need to allow for particularlity as well as generality in ethics. Yet surprisingly *'Geography and Ethics'* (Proctor and Smith) published in late 1999, which is the outcome of the geography and ethics project, pays scant attention to the everyday realities of morality. The book defines ethics as the study of morality or particular moral concerns, and morality as judgements as to whether human actions are right and wrong (Proctor, 1999: 3). It is careful to reassure the reader that the volume is trying to create a space away from "out-of-touch" academic posturing on ethics, or

"in-your-face" morality (Proctor, 1999, 2). Yet, despite this, the book appears to be more interested in theorising about correct ethical positions than trying to understand how the situated individual is likely to amalgamate that ethical position into a decision making context. With the exception of a chapter tracing the role of various organisations in the fall of Srebrenica (Tauthail, 1999), there is a marked lack of any grounded research into ethics and, whilst there are four chapters dedicated to ethics in the practice of ethnographic research, there is a marked absense of ethnographic research on ethics in practice. I, therefore, suggest that this thesis has made a very real contribution to the field of geography and ethics. The complexity of consumer ethics shows that geographical contributions to a "context-sensitive ethics" (Smith, 1999) have to further supplement theoretical understandings of the role of context with more ethnographic research to begin to understand how people both construct their ethical relationships to distant others, and mediate those constructions through their own situated norms of ethical practice. Without attention to "everyday practices" of morality, geographical theories of ethics will continue to remain "out-of-touch" despite the best intentions of the theorists.

Ethical consumers, ordinariness and the geography of commodities

Theorists studying the geography of commodities are becoming increasingly interested in the role that consumers can play in improving environmental and social conditions throughout the system of production and provision. In particular the geography of commodities literatures have begun to highlight the potential for geographers to uncover the links between different actors throughout the commodity system. In studying those ethical consumers who have already committed to trying to improve conditions of production, have already made the connection across the commodity chain, this thesis has some important points to make about the potential of the ordinary consumer to undertake responsibility for the environmental and social impacts of their consumption.

The ethical consumers in the sample put considerable effort into the collection of information about both issues and products. It was apparent that they held significant amounts of information about the impacts of their consumption practices, which had been derived from both expert sources and from friends and family. However, in the actual choice of products, rather than demonstrating a

determination to buy the most ethical product the consumers frequently tended towards a set of "popular" ethical purchases, often where the issue or the company had been given a high media profile. Moreover, the ethical consumer had not managed to achieve an "unveiling" of the commodity fetish to now be aware of the true nature of the processes of production. Instead knowledges about the impacts of a product were often partial, and highly subject to provision trust. Hence the ethical consumer would purchase goods with some form of ethical labelling, even where they were unsure of the significance of the label. Furthermore, the interviewees showed evidence of having "fetishised" the ethical label, endowing the ethical product with virtues it did not possess. For example believing that environmentally friendly products are not animal tested. It would appear that the ethical consumer is not a fully empowered hero of consumption, but an ordinary individual striving to do their bit.

This point has important consequences and is not meant to belittle the ethical consumer. Those geographers who are calling for the reuniting of production and consumption (most obviously Hartwick, 1998) have to be aware of the informational landscape that knowledge of production processes would create. Our lives are mediated by thousands of different products. A renaturalisation or defetishisation of commodities would leave the consumer reeling under an influx of information from which they have to determine the most appropriate product to choose. As Cherry shows in her confusion about which type of milk is the most ethical, too much information can be a barrier to action. Information has to be presented in usable forms. As the relationship to the "ethical other", to efficacy and agency, has to be presented to the consumer to allow the facility of concern and responsibility, and as all information will be subject to trust relationships, this is more complex than assuming that the academic is capable of producing value free information that the consumer will be willing and able to act upon.

Furthermore, any project to reunite production and consumption would have to examine further the "imaginary other" in the ethical relationship. In Chapter Four I showed that the "other" tended to be certain animals, or particular notions of a happy craft worker. In researching the impact of consumption on producers or the produced, the academic would have to be sure that revealing a true picture of the conditions of labour, and the difference that an ethical purchase would make,

would actually facilitate action. Is the ethical consumer going to be motivated to buy a fair trade product if the worker still lives in comparative poverty - still has to carry out back-breaking work on a tea plantation? I am not suggesting that we should not be concerned to demonstrate the realities of production, but I am concerned that we should be aware of the limitations of the ordinariness of the ethical consumer. Before rushing headlong into a well-meaning project of defetishisation, of geoethics, there needs to be an understanding of the most appropriate forms of geographical knowledge. From the practices of the ethical consumers I would suggest that the commodification of ethicality, getting with the fetish, may well be the most appropriate form of information. The consumer is thereby able to "do their bit" with the minimum effort and inconvenience, which in turn encourages consistent performances of ethics. However, as all system trust is provisional, and ethical credentials are subject to high levels of surveillance, the use of ethical commodity fetishism does not result in handing the control of ethicality to the producer, but instead recognises that the ethical consumer has only a limited ability to determine the most appropriate ethical purchase. I, therefore, suggest that this thesis has made a contribution to contemporary theories of the geography of commodities by demonstrating the need for geographers to connect with both the theoretical debates surrounding knowledge and action, and the complexities of the situated meanings of consumer knowledge.

Ethical selves

In Chapter Three, I showed that the interviewees interrelated their identities and their ethical consumer practices in different ways. Whereas Lisa could be viewed as using ethical consumerism as a set of practices affiliated to her lifestyle choice, or subculture group, mostly ethical consumption represented a deeper sense of self and identity than simply consuming for display. Indeed, it could be argued that all the ethical consumers had chosen their consumer practices through notions of what it is good to be, and related notions of what it is good for society and the environment to be. For the ethical consumer then, consumption practices are viewed as instrumental in achieving a better world. In this ethical consumerism can be viewed as a set of political practices in the nature of femininst theories of the personal as political. There were connections to other ethical and political practices that could be taken as a set of actions involved in an ethical consumer movement. Many of the consumers worked in related fields, or were involved in campaigning.

Two were involved in direct action. A host of practices accompanied ethical consumerism, such as recycling, ethical investment, and charity giving. However, the relationship between the ethical consumer and an ethical consumer movement is more complex. Few of the interviewees classified themselves as part of a particular political project, and those who did have a clear relationship to a set of collective actions or lifestyle grouping tended to only relate this to one aspect of their consumption practices, for example Jane and veganism. It would seem that if ethical consumerism is to be viewed as a social movement, then it is one in which individuals practicing a diverse set of political, ethical and lifestyle practices see themselves as at the forefront of cultural change. What is more clear, however, is that where ethical consumerism is part of a broader picture it is an attempt to provide a consistent sense of self as a good person. Hence, it matters to the ethical consumer that they are able to compare themselves to other ethical consumers and explain why their own actions are the most appropriate.

Despite the uncomfortable social identity which accompanies ethical consumerism then, the ethical consumers derived a positive sense of self from their consumption practices. They undoubtedly felt empowered by their practices, liberated by the ability to be able to do their bit to address global issues. At the same time however, the ethical consumer accepted the limitations of her actions. For the majority of the interviewees, ethical consumerism as a political and moral project, was a project conducted by ordinary people who simply happened to care deeply about the effects of their consumption practices. It was, therefore, a project which required constant negotiation of everyday concerns. So, the ethical consumer is personally empowered, but remains very much within the boundaries of conventional culture. Even those consumers who had made a conscious choice to down-shift had houses full of the products of a wealthy, Western society. With the exception of perhaps Cherry, and at times in her life Pam, the ethical consumers rather than being "something other", were characterised by a certain kind of ordinariness. Having a single gendered sample means that it remains to be seen whether male ethical consumers would demonstrate similar sets of political practices as displayed by my interviewees, or whether men would practice ethical consumerism alongside more public acts of political protest, with different lifestyle and identity attachments.

Willetts (1997: 117) argues that vegetarianism "is an identity that one can dip in and out of." I do not argue that the vegetarians and vegans in my sample did not at times transgress their animal welfare ethics. However, having studied the practice of vegetarianism/veganism alongside the ethics of fair trade and environmentalism, concentrating on the inconsistencies of vegetarians appears naive. All of the interviewees had a variety of barriers to ethical consumerism. Ethical produce would not necessarily be bought if the cost were too high, if it were too inconvenient or if it were detrimental to the self or to others. Many of the barriers were structural. The inability of Ruby to eat non-organic produce, or be around a variety of chemicals, demonstrates the extent of the everyday negotiations that have to be made to allow the ethical consumer an ordinary lifestyle. For the most part this is accepted. Nobody would expect an environmentalist to only have organic produce, low energy and recycled products. Neither is the committed fair trader derided for only having four different fair trade products in their weekly shop. It would be considered extraordinary if an ethical consumer turned down a meal because it was not organic, or made with fairly traded produce. It is only vegetarians and vegans who are expected to have a constancy of ethics.

Here, once again, the value of studying more than one ethical practice at a time is realised. What becomes obvious is the fact that it is precisely because vegetarianism is <u>not</u> an identity that can be dipped in to, that there is an interest in vegetarians who have the occasional bacon sandwich. I have already shown in Chapter One, that moral philosophers have been aware of the mismatch between ethics and action for millennia, and social psychologists acknowledged two decades ago that it was impossible to determine behaviour from attitudes, instead one could only determine intentions. Vegetarianism and veganism, as identity ethics, form an extremely consistent pattern of ethical behaviour judged by any standard. What I am arguing then is that rather than vegetarianism being read as an identity which is an end in itself, it is better viewed as a process or a commitment to a pattern of behaviour.

Even for those ethics that the ethical consumer does not carry through consistently, a deeper examination reveals that an assumption about the fluidity of the ethical self across space and time would be premature. The search for methods of extending ethical practices into workplaces can be seen as implying that the

interviewee does not simply leave her ethical consuming self at home. Lesley's difficulties with shifting between her duties as a nurse, and her ethics as a consumer show that a plurality of identities does not negate a constancy of ethics. For the ethical consumer, much of the world outside the home represents a captured market, one where there is little ethical choice. At times this provides a pleasurable release from the limitations of ethical produce. Moreover, there seems little doubt that at times desire and pleasure overcome the consumers' ethics, for example with alcohol. However, whilst accepting that consistency of behaviour may not always be desirable, we need to be able to appreciate that fluidity of behaviour may not always be desirable either. Every context provides different possibilities for ethical consumerism, with structural barriers such as lack of availability of ethical products, or social barriers such as the primacy of grace, reducing the ethical consumers' ability to act in accordance with their consumer ethics. What becomes necessary is an understanding of the self which allows for constancy alongside fluidity. To unproblematically celebrate fluidity risks replacing the tyranny of an essentialised self, with the tyranny of fragmented conformity.

Conclusion

I have used this concluding chapter to establish a more general overview of the processes involved in developing individual patterns of ethical consumption. I do not suggest that all of the consumers can be categorically stated to fit in with any of the conclusions, but the majority of the interviewees do. For example, as Ruby is an ethical consumer because of health concerns, she can not be said to be undertaking any responsibility for a distant other. However, all of the other ethical consumers demonstrated "other related concern" in their ethical formulations. The majority of the interviewees could be seen as practicing ethical consumerism as a more aggregate set of political actions, with certain interviewees having a greater identification with a collective group for one of the issues involved - for example Jane and her notions of a collective "we" for veganism. Cherry, who incorporates ethical consumerism into her lifestyle as an environmental activist, practices ethical consumerism to introduce consistency of personal actions into a more radical group of practices. For the rest of the ethical consumers however, ethical consumerism can be viewed as a polite revolution, an empowerment of what are otherwise very ordinary people, in which personal consumption practices have political meaning.

The ethical consumer turns out to be neither the new hero of consumption, nor a gullible dupe. She is not fully capable of dealing with complex ethical issues and large quantities of product information, but instead has a willingness to attempt to "do her bit". Any geography of commodities which hopes to reunite production and consumption has to provide the "ordinary" ethical consumer with information in a form which she is capable of using. Inconsistencies between ethics and action reveal that the ethical consumer is no ascetic. She can be led astray by her desires, and is often concerned not to offend the sensibilities of friends and family. And yet, she attempts to reduce the barriers to ethical actions by bringing her lifestyle in line with her consumer ethics, or her consumer ethics in line with her lifestyle. Even at work, the introduction of fair trade coffee and recycling initiatives allows the ethical consumer to have some degree of consistency of self. Research into ethics and actions, must therefore understand the barriers to ethical consumption, before a conclusion about the fluidity or constancy of the ethical self can be reached.

Appendix A - the questionnaire

ARE YOU AN ETHICAL CONSUMER?

Do you regularly buy animal welfare, environmentally friendly and fairtrade products? Would you be willing to help in the first step of a three year programme of research into ethical consumerism? I am a research student looking at the types of people who ethically consume and the reasons why some people buy ethical goods when others don't. My work is entirely dependent upon ethical consumers voluntarily helping me. I would be extremely grateful if you would spare the time to anonymously answer this questionnaire, fold into three and return it **FREEPOST** to the address on the back page.

About your ethical purchases

Q1 Which of the following do you purchase?

	Regularly	Sometimes	Never
Animal welfare products	☐	☐	☐
Fairtrade/development products	☐	☐	☐
Environmentally friendly products	☐	☐	☐

Q2 Which sorts of ethical products did you first start to purchase?

- Animal welfare products ☐
- Fairtrade/development products ☐
- Environmentally friendly products ☐
- None of the above ☐
- Started buying all of them at the same time ☐

Q3 Does your partner buy ethical products?

- No ☐
- Yes ☐
- Not applicable ☐

Q4 How many of the following regularly buy ethical products?

	Most	Some	None	Not Applicable
Your Flatmates/household	☐	☐	☐	☐
Your Family	☐	☐	☐	☐
Your Colleagues	☐	☐	☐	☐
Your Friends	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q5 Where do you regularly buy your ethical products? (please tick as many as apply)

- Supermarkets ☐
- Chain stores ☐
- Local shops ☐
- Wholefood/healthfood shops ☐
- Food co-operative ☐
- Box scheme ☐
- Other (please specify) .....

Q6 How much do you normally spend on groceries per week?

Under £10	☐	£30 - £49	☐	£90 - £99	☐
£10 - £19	☐	£50 - £69	☐	£100 +	☐
£20 - £29	☐	£70 - £89	☐		

Q7 Of this, how much do you normally spend on ethical groceries per week?

Under £4	☐	£20 - £29	☐	£70 - £89	☐
£5 - £9	☐	£30 - £49	☐	££90 - £99	☐
£10 - £19	☐	££50 - £69	☐	£100 +	☐

Q8 How many people are the groceries for? .....

Q9 Which of the following do you use as sources of information about ethical issues and products?

	Source Used	Source used frequently
Newspapers	☐	☐
Specialist consumer magazines	☐	☐
Other magazines	☐	☐
Books	☐	☐
Television	☐	☐
Radio	☐	☐
Internet	☐	☐
Work	☐	☐
College	☐	☐
School	☐	☐
Word of mouth	☐	☐

Other (please specify) .....

About Your Lifestyle

Q10 Which of the following hobbies/interests do you have? (please tick as many as apply)

Pets	☐	DIY	☐
Cooking	☐	Slimming	☐
Meditation	☐	Bird watching	☐
Sport (participation)	☐	Conservation	☐
Sport (spectator)	☐	Yoga	☐
Listening to music	☐	Knitting/needlework	☐
Playing music	☐	Gardening	☐
Painting/drawing	☐	Photography	☐
Cycling	☐	Hiking/rambling	☐
Camping	☐	Caravanning	☐
Alternative medicine	☐	Aromatherapy	☐
Politics	☐	Current affairs	☐
Reading	☐	Eating out	☐
Charity work	☐	Watching TV/videos	☐
Feng Shui	☐	Travel	☐

Others (please specify) .....
.....
.....

Q11 What sorts of music do you usually listen to?
.....
.....
.....

Q12 Are you a member of a political party?
No ☐
Yes ☐
(please specify).....

Q13 Do you work/volunteer for, or are you a member of, any of the following pressure groups or charities?

	Work	volunteer	Member
Friends of the Earth	☐	☐	☐
Greenpeace	☐	☐	☐
Amnesty International	☐	☐	☐
World Wildlife Fund for Nature	☐	☐	☐
CND	☐	☐	☐
National Trust	☐	☐	☐
Oxfam	☐	☐	☐
RSPCA/RSPB	☐	☐	☐
Others (please specify)	.....	.....	.....
	.....	.....	.....
	.....	.....	.....

Q14 Have you ever done any of the following? (please tick as many as apply)

Travelled abroad for longer than a month	☐	Travelled in this country for longer than a month	☐
Been arrested for political actions	☐	Lived at a protest camp	☐

Q15 Which of the following have you attended in the last twelve months? (please tick as many as apply)

Cinema	☐	Protest camp	☐	Ballet	☐
Road protest	☐	Opera	☐	Direct action	☐
Classical music concert	☐	Demonstration	☐	Theatre	☐
Political rally	☐	Art gallery	☐	Illegal festival	☐
Museum	☐	Paid music festival	☐	Alternative medicine practice	☐
Nightclub	☐	Nightclass	☐	Gig (rock/pop/jazz/etc)	☐
Religious service	☐	Sports event	☐	Spiritual service	☐

Q16 Which of the following best describes how you see yourself in terms of religion?

Very religious	☐
Religious	☐
Slightly religious	☐
Not at all religious	☐

Q17 Which of the following best describes how you see yourself in terms of spirituality?

Very spiritual	☐
Spiritual	☐
Slightly spiritual	☐
Not at all spiritual	☐

Q18 Which of the following best describes how you see your lifestyle?

Very alternative	☐
Alternative	☐
Slightly alternative	☐
Not at all alternative	☐

Q19 Which of the following best describes your lifestyle?

Luxurious	☐
Well off	☐
Comfortable	☐
Poor, but happy	☐
Struggling	☐

Q20 Which of the following do you own/rent ?

	Own	Rent/borrow
Car	☐	☐
Dishwasher	☐	☐
Motorbike	☐	☐
Camcorder	☐	☐
Bicycle	☐	☐
Microwave	☐	☐
Television	☐	☐
Mobile phone	☐	☐
Video	☐	☐
Water filter	☐	☐
Satellite/cable TV	☐	☐
Battery recharger	☐	☐
Home computer	☐	☐

Q21 Which of the following types of transport do you use? (please tick as many as apply)

	Sometimes	Regularly	Never
Car	☐	☐	☐
Motorbike	☐	☐	☐
Bicycle	☐	☐	☐
Bus	☐	☐	☐
Train	☐	☐	☐
Tube/metro	☐	☐	☐

Q22 Please give your job title (or details of unpaid work).....
and brief description of main tasks.....
.....
.....

Q23 If applicable, please give partners job title .....

Do you live in London? Would you be interested in being interviewed about ethical consumerism as part of the next stage of my research? If so, you could either contact me at the address overleaf or ring me on 0171-637-0540. Alternately, you could write your name and telephone number here and I will contact you.

Name ..... **Telephone number**.....

Personal Questions

Q24 Gender M☐ F☐

Q25 Age .....

Q26 Are you...?

	Yes	No
Vegetarian	☐	☐
Vegan	☐	☐

Q27 Ethnicity

- Black - African ☐
- Black - Caribbean ☐
- Black - Other ☐
- Chinese ☐
- Indian ☐
- Pakistani ☐
- Bangladeshi ☐
- White - British ☐
- White - Other ☐
- Any other ethnic group ☐

(please specify) .....

Q28 Political Allegiance .....

Q29 Which Newspapers do you regularly read?

.....

.....

.....

Q30 Which magazines do you regularly read?

Ethical Consumer

.....

.....

Q31 Religion .....

↑

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Q32 Marital status

- Single ☐
- Married ☐
- Co-habiting ☐
- Divorced ☐
- Separated ☐
- Widowed ☐

Other (please specify).....

Q33 Do you have children ...

		How many?
Aged 0-1	☐	.....
Aged 2-6	☐	.....
Aged 7-11	☐	.....
Aged 12-16	☐	.....
Aged 17-18	☐	.....
Aged 19+	☐	.....

Q34 Location of home

	now	in childhood
City centre	☐	☐
Suburbs	☐	☐
Town	☐	☐
Village	☐	☐
Other (please specify)		.....

Q35 First four letters of your postcode ☐☐☐☐

Q36 Accommodation type

- Owner occupation☐
- Rented, private ☐
- Rented, council ☐
- Squat ☐
- Other (please specify) .....
- .....

Q37 Employment status

- Employed ☐
- Retired ☐
- Student ☐
- Housewife ☐
- Unemployed ☐
- Other .....

Q38 Educational level

- GCSE ☐
- A levels ☐
- Degree ☐
- Masters ☐
- Doctorate ☐
- Other.....

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↓

Thank you for taking the trouble to fill in this form. Please fold in three along the dotted lines. Tuck the top third inside this third, leaving the address below showing. No stamp necessary.

(Tracey Bedford)
Department of Geography
Freepost (LON 5133)
London
WC1H OBR

Appendix B - the questionnaire results

A: Tables of results

Tables 1: Which of the following do you purchase?

1A: Animal welfare products

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Regularly	57.2	62.8	47.6
Sometimes	30.7	28.7	35.4
Never	4.9	2.5	9.1
No Reply	7.2	6.0	9.1
Total (n)	446	282	164

1B: Fairtrade/development products

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Regularly	57.8	60.6	50.3
Sometimes	38.6	36.2	42.7
Never	1.3	1.1	1.8
No reply	2.2	2.1	2.4
Total (n)	446	282	164

1C: Environmentally friendly products

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Regularly	82.1	85.5	76.2
Sometimes	16.6	13.1	22.6
Never	1.3	1.4	1.2
No reply	0	0	0
Total (n)	446	282	164

Table 2: What sorts of ethical products did you first start to purchase?

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Animal Welfare	21.1	22.3	18.9
Fairtrade	14.8	13.8	16.5
Environmental	37.2	33.7	43.3
None of these	0.2	0.4	0
All of these	13.4	16.0	9.1
Animal and fairtrade	0.6	0.7	0.6
Animal and environment	6.9	8.5	4.2
Fairtrade and the environment	4.7	3.5	6.7
No reply	0.9	1.1	0.6
Total (n)	446	282	164

Table 3: Does your partner buy ethical products?

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
No	10.5	13.8	4.8
Yes	59.4	55.3	66.5
Not applicable	30.0	30.8	28.6
Total (n)	446	282	164

Tables 4: How many of the following regularly buy ethical products?

4A: Your flatmates/household

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Most	20.2	19.5	21.3
Some	13.7	15.6	10.4
None	3.6	4.6	1.8
Not applicable	42.6	41.8	43.9
No reply	19.9	18.4	22.6
Total (n)	446	282	164

4B: Your family

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Most	19.0	18.4	20.1
Some	52.4	56.0	46.3
None	13.2	11.0	17.1
Not applicable	8.3	8.1	8.5
No reply	6.9	6.4	7.9
Total (n)	446	282	164

4C: Your colleagues

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Most	3.6	2.5	5.5
Some	49.3	51.1	46.3
None	14.8	14.2	15.8
Not applicable	15.7	16.7	14.0
No reply	16.6	15.6	18.3
Total (n)	446	282	164

4D: Your friends

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Most	12.8	13.1	12.2
Some	68.4	69.9	65.8
None	5.4	4.9	6.1
Not applicable	5.2	4.9	5.5
No reply	8.3	7.1	10.4
Total (n)	446	282	164

In total across the four variables, only 16 respondents signified that they may well be ethically consuming in isolation from friends, family and colleagues.

Table 5: Where do you regularly buy ethical products?

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Supermarkets	74.9	76.2	72.6
Chain stores	15.2	17.0	12.2
Local shops	36.3	36.5	36.0
Healthfood shops	81.2	81.6	81.7
Food co-op	15.9	15.2	1.7
Box scheme	15.7	18.8	10.4
Traidcraft	6.5	8.5	3.0
Charity shops	1.8	1.8	1.8
Out of this World	1.3	1.8	0.6
Mail order	9.6	10.6	7.9
Co-operative	1.3	1.6	1.8
Oxfam	6.3	7.1	4.9
Local farmers	1.8	2.1	1.2
Wholesalers	109	1.4	0
Total (n)	446	282	164

Table 6: How much do you normally spend on groceries per week?

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Under £10	4.3	4.9	3.0
£10 - £19	13.0	13.8	11.6
£20 - £29	22.2	20.0	26.2
£30 - £49	26.2	24.5	29.3
£50 - £69	18.2	20.2	14.6
£70 - £89	8.5	8.1	9.1
£90 - £99	3.6	4.6	1.8
£100 +	2.5	2.5	2.4
No reply	1.6	1.4	1.8
Total (n)	446	282	164

Table 7: How much do you normally spend on ethical groceries per week?

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Under £4	17.0	16.3	18.3
£5 - £19	30.3	27.6	34.7
£10 - £19	26.4	28.4	23.2
£20 - £29	11.4	13.5	8.5
£30 - £49	7.4	7.4	7.3
£50 - £69	2.7	2.5	3.0
£70 - £89	0.7	0.4	0.1
£90 - £99	0.2	0.4	0
£100 +	0	0	0
No reply	2.9	3.5	1.8
Total (n)	446	282	164

Table 8: How many people are the groceries for?

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
1	27.8	26.9	29.3
2	41.5	39.4	45.1
3	11.7	13.1	9.1
4	10.7	12.4	7.9
5	3.8	4.9	1.8
6	1.1	0.7	1.8
7	0.2	0	0.6
8	0.2	0	0.6
No reply	2.9	2.4	3.7
Total (n)	446	282	164

Table 9: Which of the following do you use as sources of information about ethical issues and products?

	All (%)		Women (%)		Men (%)	
	Used	Regularly	Used	Regularly	Used	Regularly
Newspapers	42.2	11.2	42.9	9.6	40.9	14.0
Consumer mags	38.6	55.6	41.5	52.2	33.5	62.2
Other Mags	33.0	14.1	33.0	13.9	32.9	14.6
Books	30.7	10.1	34.4	12.5	24.4	6.1
Television	35.2	6.7	35.1	7.1	35.4	6.1
Radio	29.1	7.4	27.7	8.6	31.7	5.5
Internet	8.7	1.3	6.7	1.1	12.2	1.8
Work	6.3	3.1	5.7	2.5	7.3	4.3
College	1.3	0.2	1.8	0	0.6	0.6
School	1.6	0.7	2.1	0.4	0.6	1.2
Word of mouth	43.0	11.6	44.0	11.7	41.5	11.6
Total (n)	446	446	282	282	164	164

Table 10: Which of the following hobbies/interests do you have?

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Cycling	34.8	31.2	40.9
DIY	26.2	22.0	33.5
Gardening	55.8	61.3	46.3
Pets	40.8	46.8	30.5
Aromatherapy	15.9	20.2	8.5
Current affairs	44.6	44.7	44.5
Eating out	32.7	34.8	29.3
Watching TV/videos	46.9	51.4	39.0
Travel	46.8	48.3	44.5
Cooking	49.1	53.5	41.5
Meditation	15.9	15.6	16.5
Sport (participation)	26.0	22.0	32.9
Sport (spectator)	15.5	11.0	23.2
Listening to music	75.1	74.5	76.2
Playing music	21.3	20.9	22.0
Painting/drawing	13.9	16.3	9.8
camping	26.5	26.6	26.2
Alternative medicine	39.0	45.7	27.4
Politics	38.8	34.8	45.7
Reading	72.8	79.4	61.6
Charity work	34.8	38.7	28
Feng Shui	6.3	8.2	3.0
Slimming	6.3	7.1	4.9
Bird watching	17.7	14.2	23.8
Conservation	42.8	46.1	37.2
Yoga	15.2	16.3	13.4
Knitting/needlework	30.0	31.3	9.1
Photography	27.4	25.5	30.5
Hiking/rambling	39.9	35.8	47.0
Caravanning	5.1	4.7	6.1
Total (n)	446	282	164

Table 11: What sorts of music do you usually listen to?

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Classical	31.8	34.4	27.4
Rock	1.6	1.4	1.8
Jazz	2.2	0.7	4.9
Pop	7.0	7.1	6.7
Indie	4.3	3.9	4.9
Folk	4.5	4.6	4.3
All sorts	26.9	28.7	23.8
Jazz and classical	2.9	2.1	4.3
Rock and classical	0.9	1.4	0
Alternative	0.9	1.1	0.6
Techno	0.4	0	1.2
World	4.9	3.9	6.7
Religious	0.7	1.1	0
No reply	11.0	9.6	13.4
Total (n)	446	282	164

Table 12: Are you a member of a political party?

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
No	76.0	77.7	73.2
Labour	11.7	11.7	11.6
Lib Dem	3.4	2.1	5.5
Green	7.4	7.4	7.3
SDL	0.2	0.4	0
Plaid Cwmru	0.4	0.4	0.6
Conservative	0.2	0.4	0
Co-operative	0.6	0	1.8
Total (n)	446	282	164

Table 13: Do you work/volunteer, or are you a member of any of the following pressure groups or charities?

	All (%)			Women (%)			Men (%)		
	Work	Vol	Mem	Work	Vol	Mem	Work	Vol	Mem
Friends of the Earth	2.2	6.7	45.1	2.1	6.4	48.6	2.4	7.3	39.0
Greenpeace	1.1	4.0	38.8	0.7	3.5	38.3	1.8	4.9	39.6
Amnesty International	2.0	4.5	26.5	1.8	4.6	26.2	2.4	4.3	26.8
WWF	0.4	2.2	15.0	0.7	2.8	16.3	0	1.2	12.8
CND	0	1.8	11.7	0	0.7	11.7	0	3.7	11.6
National trust	1.3	0.2	22.9	1.8	0.4	24.1	0.6	0	20.7
Oxfam	1.6	4.0	20.0	1.8	5.0	20.2	1.2	2.4	19.5
RSPCA/RSPB	0.9	1.8	20.9	0.7	1.8	20.6	1.2	1.8	21.3
Relevant other*	9.4	9.9	42.2	9.2	11.0	43.3	9.8	7.9	40.2
Total (n)	446			282			164		

* Organisations are not listed separately due to the scale of relevant organsiations and the multiple membership of many of the respondents.

Total Number of respondents with no ties to any relevant organisations is 40

Table 14: Have you ever done any of the following?

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Travelled abroad for longer than a month	42.6	46.1	38.0
Been arrested for political actions	4.1	3.5	6.7
Travelled in this country for longer than a month	7.8	7.8	7.9
Lived at a protest camp	4.4	4.3	5.4
Total (n)	446	282	164

Table 15: Which of the following have you attended in the last twelve months?

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Protest camp	4.5	3.2	6.7
Ballet	9.6	11.3	6.7
Cinema	69.1	70.9	65.9
Road protest	8.7	7.1	11.6
Classical music concert	37.4	40.1	32.9
Political rally	18.8	17.7	20.7
Museum	59.6	62.1	55.5
Nightclub	18.8	16.7	22.6
Religious service	41.3	44.3	36.6
Opera	12.6	15.2	7.9
Demonstration	26.0	25.9	27.4
Art gallery	45.5	45.4	45.7
Paid music festival	18.4	21.1	18.9
Nightclass	24.4	25.5	22.6
Sports event	22.0	17.0	30.5
Direct action	10.7	7.5	16.5
Theatre	52.2	55.3	47.0
Illegal festival	3.3	1.8	6.1
Alternative medicine practice	29.3	35.1	19.5
Gig	30.5	30.1	31.7
Spiritual service	10.8	12.8	7.3
Total (n)	446	282	164

Table 16: Which of the following best describes how you see yourself in terms of religion?

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Very religious	6.1	5.3	7.3
religious	17.5	19.5	14.0
Slightly religious	22.0	22.7	20.7
Not at all religious	52.2	49.6	56.7
No reply	2.2	2.8	1.2
Total (n)	446	282	164

Table 17: Which of the following best describes how you see yourself in terms of spirituality?

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Very spiritual	10.5	8.9	13.4
Spiritual	31.2	34.8	25.0
Slightly spiritual	33.6	31.9	36.6
Not at all spiritual	21.5	21.6	21.3
No reply	3.1	2.8	3.7
Total (n)	446	282	164

Table 18: Which of the following best describes how you see your lifestyle?

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Very alternative	3.4	3.2	3.7
Alternative	24.0	26.2	20.1
Slightly alternative	58.3	57.1	60.4
Not at all alternative	11.7	11.0	12.8
No reply	2.7	2.5	3.0
Total (n)	446	282	164

Table 19: Which of the following best describes your lifestyle?

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Luxurious	0.7	1.1	0
Well off	16.8	15.6	18.9
Comfortable	72.0	71.6	72.6
Poor, but happy	8.1	8.5	7.3
Struggling	1.8	2.8	0
No reply	0.7	0.4	1.2
Total (n)	446	282	164

Table 20: Which of the following do you own or rent/borrow?

	All (%)		Women (%)		Men (%)	
	Own	Rent	Own	Rent	Own	Rent
Car	75.7	6.1	78.8	5.3	71.3	7.3
Dishwasher	23.3	0.7	24.5	1.1	21.3	0
Motorbike	5.2	0	4.6	0	6.1	0
Camcorder	10.8	0.7	9.9	0.7	12.2	0.6
Bicycle	67.9	0.2	67.0	0.4	71.3	0
Microwave	48.9	2.2	49.6	2.1	47.6	2.4
Television	81.1	5.8	81.6	5.7	80.5	6.1
Mobile phone	17.7	1.1	16.7	1.1	19.5	1.2
Video	62.8	5.2	64.2	3.9	60.4	7.3
Water filter	36.3	0.4	38.7	0.4	32.3	0.6
Satellite/Cable TV	6.5	0.4	5.0	0.4	9.1	0.6
Battery charger	55.6	1.1	51.1	1.4	63.4	0.6
Home Computer	55.1	0.2	55.0	5.7	55.5	3.0
Total (n)	446		282		164	

Table 21: Which of the following types of transport do you use?

	All (%)			Women (%)			Men (%)		
	S	R	N	S	R	N	S	R	N*
Car	31.8	59.2	4.7	31.6	61.7	3.5	32.3	54.9	6.7
Motorbike	4.0	2.7	54.5	4.6	2.5	52.8	3.0	3.0	57.3
Bicycle	37.4	24.0	19.7	38.7	19.1	19.5	35.4	32.3	20.1
Bus	57.0	20.6	8.1	57.8	20.9	6.7	55.5	20.1	10.4
Train	63.5	24.0	4.0	63.8	23.8	4.3	62.8	24.4	3.7
Tube	43.7	8.5	16.6	44.0	8.5	17.0	43.3	8.5	15.9
Total (n)	446			282			164		

* S = sometimes, R = Regularly, N = never

Table 22: What is your job?

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Related professional	18.8	22.3	12.8
Unrelated professional	46.0	37.9	59.8
Related non-professional	3.6	4.6	1.8
Unrelated non-professional	6.5	5.7	7.9
Student	4.9	6.0	3.0
Home-maker	5.4	8.2	0.6
Retired	11.2	12.4	9.1
Total (n)	446	282	164

Table 25: Age

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Under 18	0.7	1.5	0
18 - 30	15.7	16.9	12.8
31-40	25.6	25.2	26.2
41-50	29.3	28.7	30.5
51-60	12.4	10.7	15.3
Over 60	14.1	17.0	9.1
Total (n)	436	282	154

Table 26: Vegetarian/vegan?

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
No	42.4	42.6	42.1
Vegetarian	53.8	53.5	54.3
Vegan	3.8	3.9	3.7
Total	446	282	164

Table 27: Ethnicity

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Black African	0.2	0	0.6
Chinese	0.2	0	0.6
Indian	0.4	0	1.2
White British	89.7	89.4	90.2
White other	6.7	9.6	1.8
Other	0.9	0.4	1.8
No reply	1.8	0.7	3.7
Total (n)	446	282	164

Table 28: Political Allegiance

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Labour/socialist	37.7	37.9	37.2
Lib. Dem	11.0	10.6	11.6
Conservative	1.1	0.7	1.8
Marxist	0.4	0.4	0.6
Green	16.1	17.4	14.0
Left/green	3.8	1.8	7.3
SWP	0.2	0.4	0
Anarchist	1.3	0.7	2.4
Plaid Cwmru	0.7	0.4	1.2
No reply	27.6	29.8	23.8
Total (n)	446	282	164

Table 29: Which newspapers do you read regularly?

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Left-wing broadsheet	43.7	44.0	43.3
Right-wing broadsheet	7.0	5.7	9.1
Left-wing tabloid	1.8	2.1	1.2
Right-wing tabloid	2.2	2.8	1.2
Mixture	2.5	2.5	2.4
Local only	11.7	13.8	7.9
No reply	31.2	29.1	34.8
Total (n)	446	282	164

Q 30) Which magazines do you regularly read?
Percentage reading one or more related magazine (e.g. environmental journal):
All = 52.9%
Women = 52.6%
Men = 53.6%

Table 31: Religion

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Christian (mixed)	28.0	33.0	19.5
Catholic (mixed)	4.5	5.0	3.7
Quaker	4.9	3.5	7.3
Buddhist	2.9	1.4	5.5
Jewish	0.7	0.7	0.6
Unitarian	0.9	1.1	0
Pagan	1.6	1.8	1.2
Jehova Witness	0.2	0.4	0
Hindu	0.2	0.4	0.6
Others	4.5	4.7	4.2
No reply	51.6	48.2	57.3
Total (n)	446	282	164

Table 32: Marital Status

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Single	22.2	19.1	27.4
Married	49.1	47.9	51.2
Co-habiting	14.6	17.4	9.8
Divorced	6.1	7.8	3.0
Separated	2.5	2.5	2.4
Widowed	2.9	3.9	1.2
No Reply	2.7	1.4	4.9
Total (n)	446	282	164

Q 33) Number of respondents with no children Men = 49%
Women = 47%

Table 34: Where do you live?

	All (%)		Women (%)		Men (%)	
	Now	Youth	Now	Youth	Now	Youth
City Centre	17.0	6.5	18.4	5.0	14.6	9.1
Suburbs	27.6	35.7	25.2	35.8	31.7	35.4
Town	26.2	26.0	26.6	23.8	25.6	29.9
Village	22.2	22.0	24.5	25.5	18.3	15.9
All of the above	0	0.2	0	0.4	0	0
Farm	0.7	0.9	0.7	1.4	0.6	0
Countryside	4.9	4.7	3.9	5.3	6.7	3.7
Abroad	0	0.9	0	1.4	0	0
Total (n)	440		280		160	

Table 36: Accomodation type

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Owner occupation	81.6	81.2	82.3

Rented, private	11.9	11.7	12.2
Rented, council	1.3	1.4	1.2
Parents	2.5	2.8	1.8
Housing co-op	0.7	1.1	0
Job provided	1.3	1.8	0.6
Total (n)	446	282	164

Table 37: Employment status

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Employed	59.2	56.0	64.6
Retired	14.8	15.6	13.4
Student	5.4	6.7	3.0
Housewife	7.2	10.6	1.2
Unemployed	2.2	1.1	4.3
Self-employed	9.9	8.9	11.6
Sick	0.4	0.7	0
No reply	0.9	0.4	1.8
Total (n)	446	282	164

Table 38: Educational level

	All (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
GCSE	13.2	13.1	13.4
A level	13.9	14.5	12.8
Degree	46.0	48.9	40.9
Masters	12.6	12.4	12.8
Doctorate	5.2	2.5	9.8
PG Dip	1.6	1.8	1.2
Dip	2.2	2.5	0.6
City and Guild	0.7	1.4	0.6
Total (n)	425	274	151

B: Cross tablulations

Cross tabulations 1: Attendance of protest camps and the purchase of ethical products

1A: animal welfare products and attendance of protest camps

	Regularly bought	Sometimes bought	Never bought	No reply
Did not attend	16	2	1	1
Attended a protest camp	239	135	21	31

1B: fair trade products and attendance of protest camps

	Regularly bought	Sometimes bought	Never bought	No reply
Did not attend	243	167	6	10
Attended a protest camp	15	5	0	0

1C: environmentally friendly products and attendance of protest camps

	Regularly bought	Sometimes bought	Never bought	No reply
Did not attend	348	72	6	0
Attended a protest camp	18	2	0	0

Cross tabulations 2: Involvement in direct action and the purchase of ethical products

2A: animal welfare and involvement in direct action

	Regularly bought	Sometimes bought	Never bought	No reply
Not involved	222	124	22	30
Involved in direct action	33	13	0	2

2B: fair trade and involvement in direct action

	Regularly bought	Sometimes bought	Never bought	No reply
Not involved	218	164	6	10
Involved in direct action	40	8	0	0

2C: environmentally friendly and involvement in direct action

	Regularly bought	Sometimes bought	Never bought	No reply
Not involved	324	69	5	0
Involved in direct action	42	5	1	0

Cross tabulation 3: Hobbies - Aromatherapy and meditation

	Meditate	Do not meditate
Practice aromatherapy	18	53
Do not practice aromatherapy	53	322

Appendix C - the recruitment flyer

Do you buy:

environmentally friendly goods,

animal friendly goods ,

and fair trade products?

Would you be willing to spare some time to talk to me about yourself and your purchases?

I am a researcher trying to provide more information about why some consumers buy people and planet friendlier products. If you would be happy to help me with my research, or would simply like to hear more about my project, you could either talk to me now or contact me on:
0171-637-0540 during the day (and ask for **Tracey** or leave your name and number and I will call you back)
0171-284-1779 in the evening
or email me at ***tbedford@geog.ucl.ac.uk***

Appendix D - thumbnail sketches of interviewees

AMY

Amy left school at 15 with no qualifications to work in a mill near her birth place in Yorkshire. After taking City and Guilds in pattern cutting she finally moved in to teaching in adult education colleges. Now in her 40s, Amy is presently unemployed due to illness. She is divorced with two adult children, and her new partner recently moved in with her. Amy sees spirituality as a big part of her life, and has several like-minded friends. She is vegetarian, tries to eat exclusively organic food, and buys fair trade products. I recruited Amy through a friend of a friend.

ANNABEL

Annabel is in her 60s and is a Personal Assistant to the Managing Director at her company. In childhood Annabel moved about a lot, was evacuated during the war and lived in South Africa with her parents. She is divorced and has two grown children. At present she lives with her mother, sister and son. The whole family became vegetarian after her oldest son visited a battery chicken farm. They are communally involved in various aspects of ethical consumerism and are particularly dedicated to financially supporting charities and ethical investment. Her spirituality forms a strong part of her world view. Annabel was recruited through the *Ethical Consumer* questionnaire and rang me several times to ensure that I interviewed her.

CATH

Cath is in her 30s. She was married when she was very young, and now co-habits with a different man who is the father of her two children. She is taking time out to look after her children, but she normally works in partnership with her partner in the family business. At present this is a sports shop, but she previously ran a health food sandwich shop designed to give Cranks a run for their money. She has been very attached to environmental causes since the conception of Friends of the Earth, but does not get involved in direct action. She finds the other environmentalists. She was formerly a vegetarian, and is still very health conscious about her food. Cath was recruited through the *Ethical Consumer* questionnaire.

CHERRY

Cherry is in her early 20s, and single; she would rather not have children. She is the most radical of the interviewees in terms of action. She has lived on environmental road protest sites and is still very involved with the organisation of direct action campaigns. She is currently unemployed having found that there was a limit to her desire to live on protest. She is vegan/vegetarian, but says that sometimes she will eat meat if it is given to her. She believes that all consumer goods have some form of ethical choice attached to them, but also thinks that individual action is pretty pointless. I recruited Cherry from outside a wholefood shop.

JANE

Jane is in her 30s, single with two children, one of whom lives in Australia with his father. She is a supply teacher, with a strong group of friends and a self-proclaimed hedonistic lifestyle. Jane became vegetarian when she was still at school, and has been vegan for the last few years. She buys environmentally friendly and fair trade products. She is quite involved in organising vegan events and has many vegan friends. I recruited Jane from an advert in a shop.

JO

Jo is in her 60s, widowed and is a retired teacher. She grew up in colonial India and came to England in the 50s. She has four full grown children, who she sees as having initiated her into ethical consumerism. All the children work in environmental/developmental areas, and her daughter is a road protester. Jo is involved in many charities and pressure group, especially concerning birds, and has been known to join her daughter on the protest site. I recruited Jo through the *Ethical Consumer* questionnaire.

JULIE

Julie is originally from Australia, in her 40s and works in various areas surrounding the environment and social issues. She is married with no children and has down-shifted. Julie is very involved in LETS schemes and permaculture. As permaculture originated in Australia, her mother was keen to permaculture their farm, leading to Julie's interest. Julie views ethical consumerism as a natural extension of her

campaigning work. I recruited Julie through the *New Economics Foundation* questionnaire.

LESLEY

Lesley is 30 and married, with no children. She is a children's nurse, and finds it difficult to maintain consistency in her consumption practices because of the necessity of disposable products in hospitals. Lesley has always had a dislike of eating meat, and had fair trade "bred" into her by her religious parents. She sells fair trade products herself after church meetings. I recruited Lesley through the *Ethical Consumer* questionnaire.

LISA

Lisa is an American who came to England to study. She is taking a year out to act as the student Welfare Officer at her university and lives in a shared house. She is single, in her 20s and has no children: she believes that not having children is equivalent to 100% recycling. Lisa is a vegan, and got into ethical consumerism through the "personal politics" of straight-edge punk. She is very involved in punk and runs her own fanzine, as well as having a whole pen-pal community of other punks. I recruited Lisa through an advert in a shop.

LIZZIE

Lizzie is in her 20s and works as an editor in a publishing company. She is single with no children, and spends a lot of time travelling around the world. Lizzie became vegetarian as a child, and got into environmental issues as a natural extension of her vegetarianism, and fair trade as a natural follow through from both. She has a love of whales and dolphins, and sometimes goes on beach clean-ups. I recruited Lizzie from an advert in *World of Difference*.

MARY

Mary is in her early 20s, and is presently between nannying jobs. She is single, with no children, and lives on her own. She has carried out voluntary work for agencies involved in ethical consumerism and hopes to go to college to take an environmental studies degree. She became a vegetarian as a child and influenced her family who then also became vegetarian. She is now vegan, and buys

environmental and fair trade products. I recruited Mary from outside a wholefood shop.

PAM

Pam is in her 50s, married with two full-grown children. She is originally from Canada, and came to England to join her British husband. She has been active in the consumer movement from early in its conception, and has offered ethical consumer advice to the Quakers and certain ethical consumer research groups. She believes strongly in fair trade and environment, but says she has little animal welfare element in her consumer practices. I recruited Pam through the *New Economic Foundation* questionnaire.

RACHEL

Rachel is in her 40s, married with no children. She got involved with ethical consumerism after she took a job with a consumer organisation. She had taken the deliberate step to down-shift from her high-flying job in publishing, and decided to take her skills to the voluntary sector. She buys as much organic food as possible, especially meat products over which she has health fears. I recruited Rachel through the *Ethical Consumer* questionnaire.

RUBY

Ruby is in her 20s, single with no children. She is originally from Canada, and came to England to find work as a voice-over artist. She started to be involved in green consumerism after being diagnosed as having environmental illnesses, caused by crop-dusting. She can only eat organic food, and avoids all chemical cleaning and personal hygiene products. This level of imposed green consumerism has severely restricted her life. I recruited Ruby through an advert in a shop.

SUSY

Susy is in her 20s and is training to be a teacher. She was very involved in in a organisation campaigning for justice and is single with no children. She came to ethical consumerism through the influences of her parents, who introduced her to fair trade products, non-animal tested cosmetics, and vegetarianism. University strengthened her Third World concerns and she joined Third World First. I recruited Susy through Lizzie, her flatmate.

Appendix E - the interview schedule

Tracey Bedford
Department of Geography, UCL
26, Bedford Way, London WC1H OAP
tel: 0171-637-0540 email: tbedford@geog.ucl.ac.uk

Dear

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. I am a research student at UCL studying ethical consumerism. Having previously worked for a research body providing information about ethical companies and products, I became aware of how little information there was about the ethical consumer. I am interested in who ethical consumers are, not just in terms of class and income, but what sorts of people they really are in their beliefs, values and interests - all in their words. Because of this I would like to audiotape the interviews; I hope this is fine with you, if not please let me know. The interviews will be used to understand the motivations for ethical consumerism, and the factors involved in making consumer choices. If I quote you in my thesis I will change your name so that you can remain anonymous and at no time will I be passing judgment on your lifestyle or consumer choices.

The one-to-one discussions will take place over two interviews: the first conducted in a pub/cafe or another mutually agreed public place; the second conducted in your home. I will phone you within the next week to arrange a suitable time in March to begin the interviews. I would be grateful if you could think of a quiet public place where you would like to meet me for the first interview. A rough schedule for the interviews is printed below.

The First Interview
Will be conducted in a cafe or pub. The interview will cover issues such as:

- Details about the consumer's life; job, hobbies, interests, partner, family, friends and how these affect consumer choices.
- When the consumer first started to buy animal welfare, environmentally friendly and fair trade products, and why.
- The reaction of others to ethical consumer choices.
- What sort of things the consumer thinks are important, and enjoyable, in life.

The Second Interview
Will be conducted in the interviewees home. In this interview certain food products, cleaning products and bathroom products would be chosen from the consumer's shopping so that we could discuss:

- What attracted the consumer to the products they have bought.
- What issues are attached to the products and what difference the consumer feels that buying these products will make.
- Where the consumer looks for information about certain products.
- How easy, and desirable, it is to be consistent in ethical consumer choices, when shopping for the home, and when eating out, on holiday etc.

Yours sincerely,

Appendix F - product issues

I have no wish to clarify the meaning of fair trade, the ingredients which have to be avoided by vegetarians, or the environmental impacts of particular products, but the ethical consumer's world is informed by certain product discourses, which may not be known by the reader. In fact even those who buy ethical goods can be unsure about the realities of production. This appendix then is to explain the most common issues and products talked about by the ethical consumers I surveyed, which have some elements of confusion attached to them. I have also tried to clarify the issues as they were at the time of the interviews. I appreciate many of them have now moved on considerably.

Ecover: Ecover, the manufacturer of cleaning products, have taken environmental factors into account about as much as is possible in a company. Not only are their products environmentally friendly, but so is their factory in Belgium, which has certain environmental innovations, including a grass roof. Unfortunately for the company it was taken over by Group Four at the height of the road demonstrations on Twyford Down, where Group Four just happened to be in charge of the security (Carvel, 1992). Ecover, who had always operated through an environmental remit, then found themselves the target of an environmental boycott of Group Four products. They also represent one of the few areas where there is direct conflict between issue areas, as offering the most natural product has meant using milk by-products in their washing-up liquid, coming into direct conflict with the vegans.

Nestlé: Nestlé have been the long running target of a human rights boycott (Dickenson, 1993). due to their practice of marketing baby milk in the Third World. Besides being expensive, the baby milk is often mixed with contaminated water and has resulted in the death of children. At one time Nestlé withdrew baby milk from the Third World after the introduction of a code of practice by the World Health Organisation (Ekins, 1989: 14), but then returned. The International Baby Food Action Network has been campaigning for a boycott of Nestlé products, particularly Nescafe, and received a large boost in 1991 when the Church of England Synod added its voice (Dickenson, 1993). Nestlé claim that the impact of the boycott has been negligible, and indeed they remain one of the most trusted brand names, but Nielson say that Nescafe lost 1% of its market share due to the Church of England intervention (Dickenson, 1993).

Boots and Body Shop: Boots and Body Shop have both been caught up in the animal testing debate. Boots have never claimed not to use animal testing as a company as a whole, but as well as pioneering a strong environmental policy (Knight, 1994), it has offered Body Shop competition by introducing ranges of non-animal tested cosmetics. This infuriated animal rights groups, who began a boycott of Boots in 1991 over their vivesection policies, which included using dogs for animal tests. Body Shop, who had always claimed to be "against animal testing", then came under attack by Jon Entine, a US journalist, and New Consumer in 1994. There were high profile suggestions that in adopting the five year rolling rule for animal testing ingredients approved by the British Union for the Abolition of Vivesection, as opposed to the more stringent 1976 cut off date used by the Cosmetic Industry Coalition for Animal Welfare[1], Body Shop were not as committed to animal rights as they claimed (Watts, 1994, Jack and Buckley, 1994). Entine and The Money Programme further called into question the extent of their Trade not Aid programme, and their environmental record. A survey on trust carried out by the Henley Centre in 1996 revealed that public trust in the companies stood at 83% for Boots, and 60% for Body Shop (Harrison, 1998).

Organic Food: Organic farming has become an alternative method of production in the Developed World, where 90% of food is produced by intensive farming methods (Anon5, 1997: 15). This is not to say that organic farming has limited space in the world today as a third of the world's population are still sustained by organic produce (Ibid: 14). However, only 1% of Britain's farmland is certified as organic (Brown, 1997), and as the demand for organic food is increasing by 30% every year (Stummer, 1997) 70% of organic food is now imported into the UK. With the World Health Organisation estimating 20,000 pesticide related deaths per year worldwide, and 3,000 cases of pesticide poisoning reported in the UK every year (Robbins, 1991), there is growing concern over the safety of food. The MAFF

[1] 1976 was decided as a cut off date for animal tested ingredients because it coincided with the change in law which effectively made it impossible to market any ingredients without then having first been tested on animals. The law placed the burden of proof of safety on the manufacturer, making it desirable to animal test as a valid means of legal proof. Companies have been working to introduce new, approved dermatological tests, otherwise there are no new ingredients allowed in CICAW approved cosmetics. The five year rolling rule adopted by BUAV as their cruelty free criteria means that a company can use any ingredient tested after 1976, but not within the last five years, as long the company neither tests the ingredient themselves or commissions the test (Eames for BUAV, 1994). The controversy with this rule is that it takes around five years to market a new ingredient or product, and therefore its validity, although not its integrity, have been questioned (Watts, 1994).

Residue Working Party found that a substantial proportion of goods contained residues of chemicals, some of which were known to be carcinogenic (Bedford, 1995) and British consumers have now received government warnings to peel apples and carrots. The standard certification for organic produce in the UK is the Soil Association symbol. As well as insuring that there have been no pesticides used on the soil for three years, the symbol guarantees no input of growth hormones and antibiotics, and has increased standards for animal welfare (Soil Association, 1992).

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